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THE OLD VICARAGE.

A NOVEL.

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AUTHORESS OF

“THE WIFE’S SISTER,” “MAY AND DECEMBER,”
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE OLD VICARAGE.

CHAPTER I.

"Love, I feel thy bitter smart
Wildly throbbing through my heart,
Waking, sleeping,
Smiling, weeping,
Still I think of thee!"

MR. BARHAM and his daughters were in London at this time, and a few days after the Duncans' arrival, Hilary and Sybil went together to call on them. The girls were very cordial and glad to meet, especially Dora, who had ascertained that the Pandanus had arrived in Eng-

land, and was, in consequence, in a desperate state of internal anxiety to hear some news of Maurice.

Whilst they were chatting together, Mr. Barham himself walked in, very gracefully gracious when he discovered who the visitors were ; quite surprised to learn that they were visiting Sybil, and in London, without his knowledge, and taking some civil interest in the present object of their chief concern.

“I do not know anything about these new steamers,” observed he, “I have never had an opportunity of studying these subjects ; yet it is an important one, one which deserves the attention of those who hold a large stake in their country’s welfare ; being a subject which must strongly affect the interest of a great naval power. I must take the matter into consideration.”

“I am sure my brother would be happy to show you his new ship, if you would honour the

Erratic with a visit," observed Sybil, very proud of Maurice and his steamer also.

"Well, Mrs. Farrington, that would be a good idea ; what do you say, Isabel ? suppose we were to make an excursion to Woolwich !" observed he.

"It really would be worth while," said Miss Barham ; "as you say, sir, one ought to know something about the great means of defence for our nation. I think it would be a proper thing to do ; and as we know both the captain and lieutenant a little, we could not have a better opportunity than now."

"Be it so, then," was his answer. "How shall we arrange about time ? it might be we should go at an inconvenient hour, without some previous arrangement. How can you communicate with your brother, Mrs. Farrington ?"

"He will be up with us this afternoon, I expect," replied Sybil ; "shall I send him to you if he comes ? That would be simple."

“ Exactly ! that would simplify the matter, as you say. Isabel, the gentleman might dine with us, I think. The table will not be too full. ”

Hilary listened and said not a word ; Dora too, sat in silence, but her deep interest in the subject could not be concealed from one who suspected its existence. Finally, it was settled without her intervention, that Maurice should be there for a seven o'clock dinner, and if he liked, Miss Barham added, to accompany them to the Opera afterwards, they would be very much honoured. Would not Hilary join their party ? They would be nearly alone, only Mr. Huyton would be with them.

It was fortunate she mentioned him, or the temptation to accompany Maurice would have been irresistible ; but that name was enough. Hilary decidedly declined, and wondering much what the result would be, the ladies took leave, and returned home.

“ I cannot go, Hilary,” said Maurice, when

he heard the invitation ; “ must I ? ” He looked exceedingly disturbed. Sybil, perfectly unaware of any private reasons, pressed it warmly. He must, it would be so rude, if he had no reason to give ; and then it did not matter, however dull it might be to go, he could not escape this visit to the ship, and it would be much better to be civil, and they were always kind, even though Mr. Barham was tiresome ; and he would like to meet Mr. Huyton, who was to be there, and really the two young ladies were worth seeing, they were so pretty !

Maurice laughed off his embarrassment, by declaring Sybil’s arguments were exemplary *non-sequiturs* ; but at the same time suffered himself to be persuaded into what he wished above all things.

His ideas of time that evening before setting out, were somewhat wild, and the pains that he took at his toilette were not to be told. He succeeding in reaching the house rather early,

and found, as he had perhaps guessed by intuition that he should, Dora alone in her drawing-room ! Their meeting had all the flutter and emotion of forbidden pleasure ; time had not changed his feelings in the least, and although hers had by no means been so invariably constant, she fancied that they had, and told him so, and that did pretty nearly as well. The sight of the handsome lieutenant, with his pleasant smile, and captivating manner, revived her somewhat declining affections, and the conviction that during two years of absence, she had yet retained all her former power over him, gratified her vanity, as well as her tenderness towards him.

Their interview was short ; another knock at the door warned them of intruders, and sent Dora hastily from the room, whilst Maurice turned round to greet Charles Huyton, whose entrance he had been prepared to expect. Dora did not reappear until the moment dinner was

announced, just in time to be consigned by her father to Mr. Duncan's protection, and she had pretty well recovered her complexion and her serenity when they took their places at table.

How delightfully the evening went, need not be told; the delicious little momentary interviews, whilst cloaking the ladies for the Opera, the whispered words, the meeting of hands with a thrilling emotion, the pleasure of sitting beside each other in the carriage, the intervals when other persons claimed Isabel's attention, and allowed Maurice leisure to devote himself to Dora; the stolen glances, the intelligent, and yet hidden smiles, in fact, all the dear and dangerous sweets of a clandestine affection, need not be dwelt on. Then there was the grand, crowning hope of another meeting, the plan for the excursion to Woolwich, which was fixed for the ensuing Tuesday, when it was settled that a large party should unite to inspect the Erratic; affording Mr.

Barham and Isabel, and such patriots as were concerned for the good of the nation, an opportunity of improving their knowledge on an important subject, and providing for others who were satisfied with more personal and less philanthropic views, an occasion of a pleasant social meeting, and an agreeable refreshment. The Duncans, of course, were to join the party, and Mr. Farrington, if he could steal a day from briefs and business. Charles Huyton was to be there also. Isabel asked him; they were to go down by water, and the point of rendezvous, the hour, and the various other particulars were all settled with accuracy by Mr. Barham himself.

It was not destined however, to take place quite so soon. A slight indisposition on Mr. Barham's part obliged him to defer the engagement; for however anxious he might be to benefit the nation at large, by his practical knowledge regarding screw steamers, he yet believed him-

self to be conferring a still more important advantage on society, in taking care of his own health ; at least, this was the reason assigned for the change of plan, which considerably disappointed some of the party concerned.

Be his reason good or bad, the excursion was put off for a week, and in the mean time, each day that Maurice happened to be in town, he considered it his positive duty to go and call in Eaton Place, to learn how the invalid was, and when it would suit him to fulfil his promise. Once or twice too, it, happened, through some contrivance of Mr. Huyton's and Dora's, the families met in excursions for other objects, and Hilary was occasionally thrown into company with Charles ; but, as there was never anything in his behaviour to distress her, she was beginning to feel hardened regarding such meetings, and to view them with much indifference.

Indeed, her feelings were too deeply engrossed by other matters to have much thought to be-

stow on her former lover. Dora and Maurice made her very uncomfortable ; they seemed perfectly infatuated now ; were more desperately in love than ever ; and Hilary could not help expecting that some grand discovery and consequent domestic disturbance would be the result. She wondered neither Isabel nor Mr. Barham appeared to notice it. That Charles Huyton had, she knew, for he had hinted it to her, with a significance and expression not to be mistaken. But it was not really so evident as her fears and consciousness made her imagine ; Charles discovered it partly by former observations of his own, but more now, by watching her eyes, and reading their anxious and troubled looks.

But the hour of parting was drawing near : the Erratic was almost ready for sea ; the crew were on board, and she was reported fit to sail in four days more. Now then must be the Woolwich party, or never. Mr. Barham was well—agreed to the plan once more—the wea-

ther was fine—the day and hour came, and they started. It was not to be expected that Mr. Barham would expose his daughters to the contaminating mixture of society to be met with in an ordinary river steamer; they had one hired expressly for the occasion, and everything was in as first-rate a style as possible.

Fair shone the sun on the river Thames, as they steamed down its waters, so famous as a channel of commerce and a subject of indignant complaint to the citizens of London; and merrily the party were dashed along, whilst Mr. Barham descanted learnedly on the subject of trade and landholders, Britain's position, privileges, and duties, and the grand part which a resident proprietor, and one who did his duty to his country, filled in the vast affairs of the nation; whilst Isabel leant on his arm and approved, and Charles Huyton cast anxious glances at Hilary, and longed to place himself beside her; and the others moved about, and

talked nonsense at random, and with great enjoyment.

They reached their destination at last, landed, and were met, as had been agreed on, by the captain of the *Erratic*, who conducted them forthwith to the dock where the steamer still lay. The happy first lieutenant received them at the gangway, authorised by every circumstance to take Dora under his peculiar care, even as her elder sister was the natural charge, for the time being, of the captain.

To the quarter-deck they went first, where they all remained to chat and discuss their voyage, to peep over the bulwarks, and ask questions about the vessels lying along-side; or to gaze up with admiration and wonder at the complicated ropes and spars towering over-head.

The Barhams were quite new to such a scene, and Isabel was rather more ignorant of the realities of a sailor-life than Dora, who was supposed never to know anything at all, so that

Captain Hepburn had his time and attention fully occupied by the questions and observations of Miss Barham and her father, and could only contemplate Hilary from a distance. Maurice lost nothing in personal appearance by his uniform, which Dora, for the first time, saw him wear ; his crisp brown hair looked particularly fascinating, curling out from under the gold-laced cap which sat so gracefully, she thought, upon his head. Hilary, too, looked at her lover with feelings of admiration ; but it was not merely for his personal charms ; she loved to watch the quick motion of those fine dark eyes, the intelligence and kindness they conveyed, agreeing so well with the firm, yet sweet expression of the mouth ; she loved, best of all, to see those eyes settle on her with a deep, grave look, and to know that it was concern for her interest, and anxiety for her happiness, which filled them with such unutterable tenderness ; a tenderness that would have prompted

him, she knew, to sacrifice anything of this world, any pleasure, any advantage, any hope to secure her happiness and welfare.

Admiration for Maurice's handsome face had much to do with Dora's love, but Hilary's admiration was rather the result than the source of hers.

A summons to luncheon in the captain's cabin called them to the first serious concern of their visit ; and when the repast was concluded, it was judged appropriate to perambulate the whole ship, and inspect everything worth seeing. This ceremony concluded, the party landed, determined to walk round the dockyard, and see some of the works carried on there.

Out of his own vessel, Captain Hepburn by no means considered that duty any longer attached him to Miss Barham ; and by a little skilful arrangement, and judicious patience, he succeeded, for the first time, in securing Hilary as his own companion. Sybil was tired, and

wished to sit down, whilst the greater part of the visitors continued their investigations ; - and her elder sister was not unwilling to remain with her under the special guardianship of Captain Hepburn, whose uniform was a certain protection against the inquiries and suspicions of correct policemen, anxious to secure her Majesty's dockyard from the possible evil designs of unknown ladies and civilians.

"Now, Hilary, I have one thing to say, one request to make, which, had I time to spare, I would either omit, or produce with a proper preface ; but I cannot do either."

So began he, as soon as the others were out of hearing. Hilary raised her eyes to his face with a look of questioning anxiety.

"Sybil, I trust you will support my petition," continued he, "so I shall speak before you without hesitation ; Hilary, my prayer is, that you will become my wife before I leave England."

“ Captain Hepburn !” ejaculated she, colouring.

“ Why not ? you have already promised one day to be so ; why not fulfil that promise at once, and let me know you irrevocably mine before I leave you ?”

“ Do you doubt me, then ? do you mistrust my faith ?” asked she, hesitatingly.

“ If I did, Hilary, I should never have urged such a request ; if *I* thought you would change, I should have small wish to make you my wife. No, it is no selfish desire to secure any good to myself, or to gratify a jealous and mistrustful affection, dearest ; it is your own comfort and welfare which occupy my mind.”

“ I believe it,” said she, frankly, placing her hand in his ; “ and as I have promised to be one day your wife, I will make no foolish and idle objections. But——”

“ But what, love ?”

“ I do not see the reason, the occasion, the

propriety of this step; so sudden—I had not thought of it.”

“I am aware that there are objections, but they seem to me slight compared with the advantages of the measure,” said he, gravely. “What say you, Sybil, does it shock you so much?”

“No, indeed!” cried she, speaking with all the enthusiasm of a happy young wife, “I think there would be no harm, if there is time.”

“We could manage that, unless Hilary is very particular about her gown and bonnet,” said he, smiling; “and even such things can be got in London, on the shortest notice, if she wants them.”

“Ah, no, I do not care for that,” said Hilary; “but tell me what you ask, and why, and give me time to think and breathe; if I were to—to do this—I cannot leave my father, even to follow you, Captain Hepburn.”

“No, that is not what I mean; don’t be so

frightened, and look so pale, dear Hilary ; we move out of dock and drop down the river on Saturday, probably, about the middle of the day ; what I ask is, that early on that morning, you would meet me at the church here, and become my wife ; the business part I will arrange. Your whole party could come with you to Woolwich, your father and all ; and Maurice would be there too ; surely that would secure respectability enough ! and then when I leave you, you shall be as much your own mistress with regard to your movements as ever. Hurstdene can be your home during your father's life, Hilary ; but should you lose that, before I return, you would have at least the additional protection which the name of a married woman can confer ; and in this country that is of no small importance. And, Hilary, then you would be for ever safe from the intrusion, the attentions, the insidious friendship of Mr. Huyton."

“Do you fear him?” said she, looking up.

“I mistrust him; as to *fear*, that is not the word. Once my wife, and you will be safe, there will be nothing for him to hope more, and, perhaps, his passion may really expire; but till then, I am certain he will continue to haunt you, and his disposition makes me tremble.”

“You judge him hardly,” said Sybil; “you are a prejudiced rival.”

“Not a jealous one, at least, Sybil: but I watched him to-day; I saw his face darken and his very lips grow pale, as his eyes fell on the portrait of Hilary, in my cabin. I saw a world of evil and envious passions pass over his brow, as he stood and gazed at it. He said the truth when he declared in the hut in the forest, that whilst you continued single he would never cease trying to win you. Let me place one insurmountable barrier between you

and him, and let us extinguish the last faint hope of your changing. He will then leave you in peace."

Hilary paused, pondered, and hesitated. "It is so soon," was all that she could say in objection, there really seemed no other to urge.

"However long you defer it, if your wedding day is ever to come at all, we shall eventually come within four days of it," observed he, smiling a little.

"So sudden!" ejaculated she again.

"I thought you had been contemplating it these two years past—I am sure I have," was his answer.

This time she could not forbear smiling a little herself, and the day was won by her lover.

"Really," observed Sybil, "I think you are quite right, nobody can call it sudden after an engagement of two years; and if the next three

days allow all necessary arrangements to be made, the time is as good as a month or two."

"I do not suppose many people will concern themselves about our wedding," replied he; "and those who do, may have facts explained to them."

It was agreed to before the rest of the party rejoined them, and the thanks and gratitude of the gentleman were also sufficiently expressed.

It made Hilary very grave and thoughtful, for the whole way home; although Captain Hepburn was by her side, and trying to cheer her. She was reviewing what she had undertaken; yet it was by no means alarming. There was no new anxiety or responsibility thrown on her at present; nothing which need break in on her quiet course of life, or disturb her care for her father and sisters. His absence would not be more painful, nor occasion greater

uneasiness, and she should at least bear his dear name, have an open, acknowledged claim to care for him, an avowed interest in his welfare and prosperity. And at some future time, she might hope for protection, support, assistance from him, to guard and guide her through life's troubles when they came. Such were her thoughts, as she leant upon his arm, and spent the time in a dream which left her no notice to bestow on those around her.

When the plan was announced in the family party that evening, it was highly approved of by all; even Mr. Farrington gave his opinion in favour of the arrangement, especially after he had some private conversation with Captain Hepburn, respecting settlements and such lawyer-like affairs. To arrange these matters effectually before Saturday, was impossible; but the lover had no intention of profiting by the haste he urged, in a pecuniary way.

Hilary's portion, being her share of her mo-

ther's fortune, was five thousand pounds ; and the whole of this, with an addition that nearly doubled it from himself, he promised to settle on her, empowering his future brother-in-law to see the business arranged, and granting him such legal authority as he recommended, to proceed about it. But of these matters Hilary knew nothing, and she never gave the subject a thought ; whether she would be richer or poorer for the marriage, she did not know ; the wealth of love and protection she was acquiring, satisfying her for the present.

Had there been no peculiar necessity for haste, in the conclusion of the marriage, nothing would have been farther from Miss Duncan's wish than to have a public wedding. A cortége of bridesmaids, a splendid breakfast, a grand assembly of fine bonnets, and fine dresses, seemed to her simple and youthful mind, altogether inconsistent with a solemn religious ceremony, although perfectly befitting the more

worldly view in which this engagement is too often considered. Quietness, simplicity, and solemnity, would have been her objects, such as would neither invite criticism, call for observation, nor serve as a display for vanity and pomp. She would have been the last to desire to publish their intentions, or to call on her neighbours for congratulations or envy. But the same delicacy which would have made her shrink from display, now acted somewhat differently, in producing a fear that a clandestine appearance might be the result of this haste. There were few, indeed, who would concern themselves about her or her proceedings ; but it was these very few whose opinions she valued, or whose censure she wished to avoid. It was this feeling which induced her to impart her intended marriage to Miss Barham and her sister, when they met on the Thursday afternoon. The young ladies were extremely interested in the narration, and expressed a great desire to be present at the cere-

mony themselves. Dora first started this idea, but Isabel was pleased with it, and finally it was settled that if their father did not object, they should join the wedding party; although Gwyneth and Sybil both laughingly declared, they would never be able to rise early enough.

“Rather than not do that,” exclaimed Dora, “I would sit up all night!”

Hilary thought she understood the secret of Dora’s extreme anxiety, and hardly knew whether to be most sorry or glad, that Maurice and she should have the dangerous pleasure of another meeting. It seemed to her to be only laying up additional stores of sorrowful remembrance and hopeless regret. But the company of the sisters was offered and pressed in such a way, as to leave little real choice to her on the occasion. Yet, why Isabel Barham should so wish to be present, as to propose taking the trouble of rising much earlier than usual, and driving all the way to Woolwich before ten

o'clock, was a little incomprehensible. Sybil said privately, that Isabel liked a freak as well as anybody, where it did not compromise her dignity, and that this little exertion had a degree of novelty about it, which made it irresistible to one weary with the platitudes of polite society and elegant decorums. Even Isabel had her portion of romance in her character, and though she would never do anything incorrect herself, she yet enjoyed the sort of secresy and mystery which naturally attended the present affair.

Mr. Barham made no objection to his daughters' plans, and according to the latest arrangements, the carriage from Eaton Place brought the two young ladies over to Mrs. Farrington's, in very good time to take an early, though rather hurried breakfast, with the bridal party, before starting on their long drive to Woolwich.

It all seemed unreal and strange to Hilary, as she sat by her father's side, during that drive.

Her thoughts were very busy, and yet would not settle on anything steadily. The purpose of the present meeting, the engagement she was about to contract, occupied her less than the parting which must immediately follow. Happiness was very far from her heart; patience and hope were what she needed. The most unwavering confidence, the most perfect dependence and trust prevented her having any misgivings as to the step she was taking. She had no hesitation in bestowing her hand where her heart had long preceded it; up to that point her path was easy and bright, and could he but have remained with her, she would not have had a shadow to dim her serenity. But that inevitable absence, what a chasm, what a dark, impenetrable abyss it seemed; what an abrupt termination to the sunshiny road she had been lately treading; how uncertain its length and its depth! all she knew of it was that it was dark and dreary in prospect, and that she

must pass it as best she could, bridging it over with hope and faith, and patience, and an earnest, steady perseverance in daily duties. These would bring her to that other side, which now seemed so dim, so uncertain, so distant, and yet which appeared to the fancy, through all the mists of futurity, fair and pleasant in prospect.

So her mind wandered away, whilst her eyes were fixed on the passing houses and the flying trees, to scenes where all would be certainty, and enjoyment, and peace; and as she looked upward at the clear, blue sky, unsullied by the smoke, and undisturbed by the noise and bustle of the vast city, whose long suburbs they were traversing, she thought of that future which alone may be depended on, that Love which never wearies or grows cold, that Protecting Care which cannot err nor cease. She remembered that her lover and herself had alike anchored their hearts there, with the sure anchor of Hope,

her restless fears dispersed, and her heart grew calm and quiet.

There was no hindrance, no delay ; the drive to Woolwich had been so accurately calculated, that they reached the church within two minutes of the time appointed ; the gentlemen were ready, waiting their arrival, and after a very brief interval more, the couple stood side by side, and hand in hand, to answer those words which bound them for life to each other.

Concentrating every feeling in the present moment, giving her whole heart and soul to the words she was repeating, and the prayers in which she was called on to join, the bride forgot all that was immediately to follow, and went through with a calm, grave self-possession her part in the short and yet impressive ceremony.

And they were pronounced to be man and wife ; and it was over, and the party gathered in the vestry to sign the register, and whisper a few subdued words of good wishes, (for who

could talk of congratulations or joy at that moment?) and Hilary awoke to a consciousness that it was all real. She leaned against the end of the table, whilst her husband held her hand in silent, speechless, subdued emotion ; as if nerving his whole frame, gathering all his strength of mind for the great trial before them. It needed not words to tell her how he felt ; she knew it in the close and tender clasp of those fingers on her own ; she read it in the grave, sad look of his eyes, in the lines of emotion about his mouth, which his utmost efforts could not conceal.

However, the parting need not be immediately, there was yet an hour of reprieve ; the tide would not serve till afternoon for the steamer to leave the dock, and it had been before arranged, that the wedding guests should all go to the hotel, where a second breakfast, most acceptable to those who had left London so early, was prepared for them by the bridegroom's orders ; as in the *Erratic*, in her present state,

it was not convenient to receive such a party. But what was the use of lingering at such a time? true, every minute was precious, and yet every minute was pain. Little mirth and little conversation was there at that board, where even yet the time, though dull, went all too fast.

They rose from the table, and, as if by one consent, the guests betook themselves to the balcony overlooking the river, that the parting between the husband and wife might at least be undisturbed. None remained with them, save the blind father, who was sitting, as if in a reverie, in a large arm-chair.

Hilary hung on her husband's neck in speechless grief; ah! this was a different thing from parting two years ago; and yet why? now that he was all her own, why did it make it so infinitely harder to let him leave her?

"My wife, my own dear wife! we shall meet again!"

She tried to smile a "yes," but tongue and

lips alike disobeyed, and tears alone answered her best efforts to be calm.

“ Hilary, your brother-in-law will tell you about settlements, what, as my wife, your income will be ; I cannot speak of money now ; only I am thankful that I can assure you an independence, which to your moderate wishes will be comfort, and almost wealth. Now farewell, my own, my best-beloved, my darling ! God guide and bless you,—once, and once more ! and now farewell ! ”

He placed her on a sofa, hurried to the balcony to see his other friends, whispered to Sybil to take care of her precious sister, and wrung the hands of all the bridesmaids in silent sorrow and repressed feeling ; then he returned to the parlour. Hilary sat as he had left her, absorbed in an endeavour to conquer her despairing grief, by thoughts of hope and aspirations for patience. She heard her father call Captain Hepburn to him. She heard the warmest blessings invoked.

upon his head; she listened almost as if in a dream, as if it concerned some other than herself; but when her husband's step again approached her, she roused herself at once; with a short exclamation, speaking of unutterable struggles within, she sprang up, threw herself into his arms, held him for one moment in silence, and then withdrawing calmly from his embrace, she said, with energy,—

“Now go! I will never be a hindrance to you in the path of duty. Go, we shall meet again in happier times, and then!—”

“And then: ah, Hilary!—”

Eyes and lips finished the sentence, but not with words, and he was gone!

Maurice must go next; there had been but little intercourse between him and Dora; he had seemed to shun her, and to devote himself to his younger sisters. This was very natural, perhaps, certainly very prudent; for Dora's share of self-control was small, and she would easily

have been betrayed into exhibitions of feeling, equally unwise and unsafe. But Dora could not reason calmly, and was as unwilling to allow that others had higher claims on Maurice than herself, as she would have been to admit her influence was declining. Foolish and excitable, she felt angry and ill-used, that he should shun her, or that when she had taken that early drive for his sake, he should have either looks or thoughts for his sisters in preference to herself.

What right had he to be more cautious than herself? why should he draw back when she advanced? In her desperation at the idea of parting, she had rather wished that their secret should be discovered; though she had not dared to tell it, she would have liked that it should be found out; and now he was, all of a sudden, so careful, so reserved, so cold. Ah! she would be cold too. She tried, but not very successfully; she could not assume the tone of indifference she wished; then she grew angry; vexed with

herself and her feelings, which she fancied so much warmer than his ; she became careless, flighty, and wild in manner ; she laughed and talked one moment in an idle way, the next she was silent and dull ; to him she was absolutely cross, and very nearly rude ; yet he was calm and unmoved, as she thought, only turning with a graver, lower, more subdued tone towards his sisters ; or his father, and decidedly avoiding her. What he was really suffering, the various emotions and changeful feelings which were torturing his heart, she did not know : she gave him no credit for an endurance which was little short of martyrdom ; and was indignant at a self-control assumed almost entirely for her own sake. Not to compromise her any farther was his object, and although he greatly feared that she was displeased, he had resolved that before the eyes of Isabel, no demonstration on his part should betray a secret she had but recently enjoined him to keep at all hazards.

The very last time they had met, he had again ventured to urge an explanation with her father, fearful, from a chance remark of Charles Huyton's, that their secret might otherwise be betrayed to him ; but this she had again forbidden ; and his earnest prayers and expostulations had been silenced and set aside. He had been disappointed, and though forced to yield, he had warned her that evil would come of it. It was this which had made her so eager to go to the wedding, and it was this which so bitterly affronted her, when she found him coldly reserved. She thought him sullen, but he was only firm, and thus they parted ; she with her girlish heart swelling with pride and mortified feeling, a sense of wrong on her own part, unavowed to herself, and therefore rankling deeply ; a wounded conscience, to which she would not attempt to apply the only balm that could have cured her. He with pain and grief, doubled and trebled as he calculated all the circumstances : a pain

greater than quitting his sisters, severer than saying a long farewell to his father : the pain of a noble mind, feeling it has done wrong, and condemned to suffer and repent in silence. He saw she was angry, and he writhed under the notion, but what could he do ? she had forbidden him the step which could alone make reparation for his conduct ; the alternative to renounce all claim on her he had fairly stated, and although she had denied the necessity of so doing, she could not alter his determination.

So they parted, with formal phrases of courtesy from him, with averted eyes, and unwillingly extended hand, and tones of coldest civility from her ; and he dashed away, to busy himself in professional duties, whilst she drove back to Eaton Place, with a flushed cheek, and an aching brow, and a heart wildly throbbing with a strange mixture of remorse, anger, and regret.

CHAPTER II.

“There stood a wretch prepared to change
His soul’s redemption for revenge.”

ROKEBY.

THE day after the excursion to Woolwich, Charles Huyton had left London for a short time. Perhaps had he been still in town, Isabel Barham might not have so readily engaged to attend the ceremony. For the last two years it had been the secret object of her life to make herself Mr. Huyton’s wife; yet she was often obliged to confess with regret, that she seemed no nearer to it than before. She managed well,

too, with much prudence and discretion, and perhaps had not the heart she besieged been pre-engaged, she might have been successful. But such a pursuit could not elevate the tone of her mind, improve her good feelings, or increase her susceptibility to generous emotions. There was no heart in it: it was simply a mercantile transaction.

The unconscious worship which Gwyneth bestowed on an idea, embodied to her fancy in the person of Mr. Ufford, was a far more ennobling sensation. She was admiring, sincerely admiring virtue and worth; and though deluding herself in supposing that these were inherent in an extraordinary degree in her idol's character, she was perfectly unselfish and true in her feelings. When her time came to be undeceived, she would not, at least, have to confess that she had been mean and mercenary, that she deserved to be disappointed, and had no right to complain. Not so Isabel Barham;

she was entangling herself, in her own endeavours to catch another ; for if she escaped with feelings uninjured by love, she had, at least, a mind debased by cunning efforts, a heart soiled and profaned by being bent on mean objects—worldly pomp and worldly riches. Disappointment was impending over her. Disappointment of the bitterest kind !

Mr. Huyton came back to London rather earlier than had been expected ; and soon after, walked up from his lodgings to Eaton Place, where, as we have already noticed, he spent much of his time. Mr. Barham was within, and after some discussion of political questions, in which he had of late been trying to interest Charles Huyton, the elder gentleman observed casually—

“ Miss Barham and her sister are gone down to Woolwich ! ”

“ Indeed, again ! not to the Erratic, I suppose,” said Charles, carelessly.

“Not exactly ; but connected with the steamer, I believe, their engagement is.”

“There must have been some strong attraction there, to draw the young ladies out so early.”

“Why, yes. I understand that one of Miss Barham’s young friends was to be married this morning to an officer at Woolwich ; and as a graceful compliment to one whom she esteems as rightly occupying her proper station in society, my daughter consented to attend as bridesmaid.”

“*Who* is the bride ?” inquired Charles, with quickness ; a strange, wild thrill of anger, pain, and bitter jealousy shooting across his heart : something forewarned him whose name he should hear ; it was with difficulty he could control himself.

“A young lady you know, I believe ; the daughter of the Vicar of Hurstdene : a most respectable man he is, and one whose connection

with our family entitles to more consideration from *us*, than it is exactly requisite to show to others in the same station."

"Ah!" cried Mr. Huyton, suddenly starting up. "I am sorry I have forgotten—— I have an engagement—— I must hurry away, or I shall be too late!"

"Shall we see you again to-day? my daughters will be sorry to miss you," said Mr. Barham, looking with a sort of speculative wonder at Charles's countenance. It was not surprising, that his face should catch the attention of even the egotistical and self-centered man. There was something so wild and strange in the expression.

"I don't know! perhaps, if I can——; maybe I shall leave town," was the incoherent reply, in a low, changed, husky voice.

"You are ill, I fear," said the other, frightened, and laying a hand on his arm; "let me ring for something."

“No ! no ! only hurried, my dear sir,” said Charles, with a painful smile. “Good day.”

He hastened away. There was war in his heart ; anger, jealousy, outraged feeling, hopeless love ; a sickening pain, a burning desire of revenge ; a vindictive determination to do—he knew not what ; anything, everything, however miserable to himself, so that he might return agony for agony ; that he might make those suffer who had so injured him. Unconscious of external objects, he gained his own apartments, and there locked in, and safe from interruption, for hours he gave way to his fiery passions. Words could hardly describe the convulsive vehemence of the feelings that tore and shook his soul. The old Greek fables of men possessed by the furies, seemed realized in him. He was mad with rage ; frantic with disappointed love ; frenzied by a wild jealousy—cruel, insatiable, dark, pitiless as the grave itself. Whatever of hope he had hitherto entertained now rose to

his mind, but to torture him more : his very plans and expectations, built on the uncertainty of his rival's profession, and his chances of supplanting him during a prolonged absence, now recurred to his memory as a mockery and a torment. Lost ! all lost ! every chance, every hope, every deep-laid scheme, swept away before the flood of his hated rival's success. Baffled, outwitted, triumphed over, scorned ; such, no doubt, he was. The sailor had understood his projects, seen through his offers of friendship, and now laughed at them, having made sure of his bride.

And was there nothing left for him yet ; no hope ! no revenge ? Was he helplessly the object of contempt ; the disappointed, the rejected lover ; could he do nothing ? Ah ! the cold heart he had failed to touch with love, might yet be bent by sorrow ; and though he could not make it his prize, he could, perchance, make it his victim !

He could wound her through another ; and he would. No matter what it cost him, no one should say he was the mourning lover, victim to an unrequited affection. No ! he would dash aside his love for her, forget it, trample on it, if needs must ; but he would have revenge. If there was one sentiment in the mind of Hilary, one affection which could rival her attachment to her husband, he knew it was her love for her brother ; nay, he believed that it was the strongest, the deepest of the two. It had been planted by nature, nursed by tenderness and sympathy through every year of her life ; it was one with which no contemporary love could interfere, with which no past friendship could compare, which no future regard could in the least degree replace.

The happiness of her brother was Hilary's greatest joy ; his disappointment and sorrow would be her most bitter grief. And this he had in his power, or, at least, he might have if

he chose. He had made himself master of Maurice's secret, he had seen and understood his passion for Dora, and he believed that to defeat him there, would indeed be a bitter blow.

He could do this! he was convinced that he had only to speak, and Mr. Barham would most gladly close with his offer; and as to Dora, he thought too lightly of her affections to suppose them invariable. Opposition he might meet with at first, but this would not daunt him; the support of her father he might rely on, and time and perseverance would do the rest. He did not doubt of ultimate success!

As to the result to himself, the securing a wife whom he neither loved nor esteemed, he did not stop to calculate that; he saw nothing in his mental visions but the feelings of others; he considered nothing but the suffering he was preparing for those who had offended him.

By a strange misappreciation of the character of the woman whom he had loved so long, and ought to have known so well, he even fancied that an ambitious desire to see her brother united to the daughter of the rich Mr. Barham, had an influence with her: that she who had been unmoved by the temptation of wealth and station for herself, had yet been open to covetous desires for her brother's advancement in life; and that regret and mortification for the loss of the heiress, would help to embitter the grief which a lover's affection must occasion.

His plans determined on, his mind made up, and his spirits calmed by resolution and despair, he returned to Eaton Place to dine with the Barhams; and for the first time since the commencement of his long intimacy with the family, he made a most marked difference in his treatment of the two sisters. His manners to Dora were expressive of a desire to

please, such as he had never betrayed before, and such as excited some surprise and disappointment in Isabel's mind, which required both spirit and good breeding to conceal.

How Dora herself received this change of manner might be gathered from Isabel's speech to her as they stood in the drawing-room afterwards.

"Well, Dora, I really think you are the greatest and most relentless flirt I ever saw."

"Am I?" said the younger sister, languidly throwing herself on a sofa, and turning away her face; "what have I been doing now?"

"Flirting to a degree beyond good manners with Mr. Huyton," said Miss Barham, looking at her own deepening carnation in a pier-glass opposite to her.

"I was only paying him in kind," replied Dora, undauntedly; "if he meant nothing, nor did I; if he was in earnest, I have no objection."

“You don’t mean to say that if Charles Huyton were to propose to you, you would accept him?” said Isabel, turning full on her sister.

“Would not you, Isabel?” was Dora’s reply.

“Our tastes are not usually so similar, that that should be any answer,” said Isabel.

“Well,” said Dora, starting up, “I mean what I say; I was not flirting with Mr. Huyton more than he was with me.”

“And if he were to ask you to marry him, you know you would say no, as you did to Lord Dunsmore!”

“No, I would accept him on the spot,” cried Dora, giving way to a desperate fit of pique and mortified feeling. “You need not look so scornful, Isabel; I mean what I say.”

“Luckily you are not likely to be put to the test,” replied Miss Barham. “But we must

go and dress, or the countess will be here before we are ready to go with her."

Dora, however, did not follow her sister's example ; but when the other quitted the room, she remained reclining on the sofa. Her head ached, her heart ached still more ; affection wounded, vanity and pride alike outraged ; sorrow, real sorrow, a sense of injustice in herself, and of having been all through in the wrong, made her bosom throb, and flushed her cheek, and really rendered her quite unfit for society.

She was still sitting languidly thinking, when her father and his guest entered the room.

"What is the matter with you, Dora ?" said the former, in a voice of unusual kindness ; "what makes you look so pensive ?"

"I am very tired, papa."

"And where is Isabel ?"

"Dressing to go out."

"And you," said Charles, approaching her,

and standing beside her sofa with looks of devotion, "are you going?"

"No, I am tired."

"That expedition to Woolwich was too much for you," observed her father.

"I believe it was," said she, with tears, half sorrow, half anger, starting to her eyes.

"Ah, we will have no more such freaks, little Dora," said Mr. Barham, "will we, Mr. Huyton? we must take more care of you, my child, in future."

The unusual kindness of her father's tone went to Dora's heart. Would he only have been always so, she would have been saved from how much unhappiness; she felt choking, and could make no answer, only laying down her burning cheek upon the pillow.

Mr. Huyton drew a chair close beside the end of the sofa, and leaning over towards her, was in the act of whispering some gentle sentiment in her ear, when Isabel entered.

“What, Dora, you not dressed! and Lady Fitzurse has been announced as waiting for us.”

“Never mind Dora, my love,” said Mr. Barham; “she is not going out to-night; she is over-tired, and had much better stay at home. I shall remain with her. How well you look, Isabel.”

So Miss Barham was forced to depart alone and with rather a rebellious heart, at leaving Dora and Mr. Huyton in such strange proximity. There is sometimes an intuitive perception of what is about to happen, which, against our will, seizes on the heart and forewarns us of evil or disappointment. Isabel, in spite of every wish to the contrary, felt at that moment that Charles Huyton was lost to her: and Dora, with a tumult of emotion she could not attempt to understand, perceived that his intentions were more serious than she had supposed.

Anger against Maurice for being more con-

scientious than herself ; regret for her own share in the past ; gratified female vanity ; a desire of retaliation, disguised under a pretence of repentance, all urged her on at this moment ; and she allowed the advances of her new lover with a graceful and encouraging simplicity, which at once surprised him, and pleased her father.

“ Mr. Barham,” said the visitor, after awhile, “ I am going into the library to look for that book you promised me ; I know exactly where to find it, I believe.”

He went, and the father taking immediate advantage of his absence, with no small degree of gratified pride and ambition, which he mistook entirely for paternal affection, proceeded forthwith to detail to his daughter the pleasing intelligence that Mr. Huyton had that very evening made proposals for her hand ; that nothing could be more agreeable than such an alliance ; it was a noble offer, and made in a

noble spirit; the settlements would be everything that could be desired; and as to the gentleman himself, there could not be two opinions as to his character, or two sentiments as to his good qualities.

Dora listened in profound silence, with rosy cheeks and downcast eyes, and fingers nervously playing with the tassel of the sofa cushion; but, in spite of her external quietness, there was the fiercest war in her heart. Love, anger, remorse, ambition, fear, doubt, vanity, all struggled there. To refuse at once, and without a reason, a suitor whom but just now she had visibly encouraged, was, she fancied, impossible; to assign the real cause of the reluctance, she could not but feel was more so still; better, she thought, it would be to temporise, to adopt half-measures, to conceal what she dared not own, to brave what she could hardly endure to contemplate; to secure peace and tranquillity for the present at least, come

what would of the future. To say yes, now, was not to bind herself irrevocably ; to accept Mr. Huyton as a suitor, by no means made it inevitable that she should become his wife ; circumstances might occur, unforeseen, incalculable, to release her from an engagement ; and meantime, perhaps Maurice would regret his conduct, would wish he had not refused the promise she had offered to make, would——she hardly knew what she wished or expected, except the single desire to alarm him and arouse his jealousy, by making him fear to lose her.

With these ideas floating in her mind, she at length brought herself to the point of speaking, and when her father closed his harangue, she looked up and said,—

“ Please, papa, tell Mr. Huyton, I am much honoured and happy, and—and all that sort of thing.”

“ You need not agitate yourself so, my dear little Dora,” said he, smiling graciously, for

Dora ended by a fit of tears ; “ there is no occasion to be unhappy, I am sure ; you do quite right to accept Mr. Huyton’s proposal ; but although I am ready to be your messenger, we must not forget propriety and honour in the message. Desirable as the connection is, we need not rush at it, as if we thought ourselves receiving, and not bestowing, a compliment. You must allow me to alter the words, although not the meaning of your answer.”

“ As you please, sir,” said Dora, faintly ; rebellious recollections were rising in her heart ; and she had a struggle at that moment not to shriek out a negative.

“ I shall go and speak to Mr. Huyton,” said the father, quite unconscious of his daughter’s agitation.

She was left alone, and burying her face in the cushions, she gave way to the bitterest tears.

She was insensible to outward objects ; me-

mory had gone back to the sunny days at Hurstdene, or tortured her with the happy hours so recently spent on board the Erratic : she sobbed and trembled violently, then thought again of the past, and thought was followed by fresh agitation. In this state she was lying when her hand was touched by some one, and starting up, she saw Charles Huyton beside her.

She felt guilty, and hurriedly tried to hide her emotion and drive away her tears ; could she have seen into his heart, she would have discovered that these accompaniments to their betrothal were but too suitable and fitting. She did glance at his face, and saw how little his eyes wore the expression she thought that love should wear. They were gloomy, sad, full rather of harsh resolve than joyful hopes. An idea struck her suddenly. This abrupt proposal, this unhappy appearance, whence did they spring ? Had he loved her long, did he really

love her now ? Was not Hilary the real object of his affections ? had this new resolve anything to do with her marriage ? It rushed through her mind, that it was despair, not love, which prompted him, and that though she might now accept his hand, he would himself, when the moment of pique was over, be the first to regret this step, and, perhaps, would not only be ready to cancel the engagement, but would be glad to resign her to another.

She dried her eyes ; he cleared his brow ; he spoke of love, esteem, honour ; she listened, blushing, and faltered out an acquiescence, which he read her too correctly not to see was half reluctant. But the reluctance neither surprised nor distressed him. He knew he had a rival to supplant, and it would have been but half a triumph to have had her accept him readily. More decided opposition would have been not unwelcome. But he knew her to be light and volatile ; her sailor-lover's feelings were of a

firmer texture, and so were his sister's also, and these were the hearts he sought to wound.

So the farce of that engagement was played out. He made love, and she listened and assented; and when Mr. Barham rejoined them, they had exchanged promises of love and faith, whilst the heart of each, in secret, entirely belied these spoken words.

It had been settled that the family-party from Hurstdene should return home on the Monday after Hilary's marriage; and the girls having taken leave of their friends, the young ladies of Eaton Place, did not expect to meet them again. Captain Hepburn had privately urged on Hilary, the advantage of inducing Gwyneth to remain some time longer with her sister in London, and Sybil was extremely anxious to detain her; but no persuasion or argument had the slightest effect upon Gwyneth herself, who, having her own reasons for wishing to return, was not to be induced to change her determination by any-

thing which could be urged by the others. She said very little in reply to the suggestions or wishes of the family, but calmly and passively persisted in her own way ; and, much to Hilary's disappointment, they all returned together as they had gone. The same evening saw Gwyneth once more strolling on the green terrace with Mr. Ufford by her side, detailing to him all the events which had occurred in London, and hearing in return most pleasant assurances of how much they had been missed, and how glad he was to have them home again. Gwyneth was very glad then that she had not staid in London.

Hilary would not have minded being left to do all the necessary arrangements, consequent on resettling at home, without help, if her sister had been employed in a way which had been less questionable in its utility ; but she could not prevent it now ; for though she sent Nest to beg Gwyneth's assistance, the young lady

only promised to come directly, and then apparently forgot all about the request.

“Poor Mr. Ufford!” said she to Hilary, when the curate having taken leave, she had time to rejoin her sister; “he is in great distress!”

“Indeed,” said the elder sister, “what is the matter?”

“He has had such bad news from Italy; his little niece is certainly dying, and her father, his eldest brother, seems very nearly as bad. He has a great mind to go to them.”

“He should talk to my father about that, not to you, Gwyneth,” said Hilary, gravely; “but why does he not? I am sure he had much better, if Lord Dunsmore wishes it.”

“I told him if he could get help in the parish, I was sure papa would agree most readily,” continued Gwyneth; “and I think he means to propose it. There is some idea of a college friend of his, taking the curacy, if papa approves; just to allow him time to go abroad.”

The next morning Mr. Ufford called again, and this time he mentioned to the Vicar his half-formed scheme of going to Italy. Of course, Mr. Duncan could make no objection, but entered kindly and warmly into the young man's anxieties.

It required a great deal of talking, however, before Mr. Ufford could decide on any plan. He came to the Vicar with only a great mind to act, and he left him, having arrived no nearer to forming a definite intention, or seeming to Hilary to have any serious idea of acting as he talked ! She felt a little annoyed at his indecision ; it would form an indisputable excuse for many visits, and much dawdling, and a reason for putting off some useful plans regarding village improvements, and deferring some alterations and amendments in the church, which had been projected, and for which Lord Dunsmore himself had contributed funds. She longed to put a little energy or decision into his mind

and actions ; she wished she could make him resolve either to go or stay ; or that at any-rate she could enlighten his understanding sufficiently to make him comprehend his own desires, and not pass the time for action in lingering between duty and her sister Gwyneth.

The sort of expectations to which his conduct gave rise in the village, was more than once significantly hinted to Mrs. Hepburn, when receiving the congratulations and good wishes of the many attached parishioners, who had known her from a child. The fear perpetually expressed that her marriage would remove her from the neighbourhood, as Miss Sybil's had done, was pretty generally followed by a more or less broadly-worded hint, that Miss Gwyneth's choice would be a better one for them, and that they hoped one of their young ladies, at least, would never leave them ; for young as Miss Gwyneth was, she was quite womanly in her ways and look, and was as well fitted to be

mistress at the Vicarage, as young Mrs. Hepburn herself. And a remark which closed one of these commentaries the first time they met her, taught her what accurate and penetrating notice those apparently indifferent spectators took of their superior's ways and proceedings.

"But bless you, Miss," said one old woman, "it would have been a far better for us had you taken the young 'Squire at 'the Ferns,' instead of this Captain from foreign parts. And they do say he will be fit to hang himself, whensoever he comes to hear of your being married to another."

Hilary tried to look unconcerned, and to speak on some other subject.

News travels fast, and it soon became known to the village gossips that Mr. Huyton did not intend to commit suicide on the occasion of Hilary's marriage.

But the first intelligence which reached the Vicarage of his plans came directly from him-

self, in a letter to Mr. Duncan, which the writer knew well must be read by Hilary herself.

“DEAR MR. DUNCAN,

“Although I am just on the point of leaving England for some weeks on most important business, I must steal a few moments to write to you, lest indifferent and gossiping tongues should convey to you the report of what I wish to be the first to communicate. Former friendship and bygone events convince me that this intelligence will be received with some degree of interest by the family at the Vicarage. I am about to marry; it is no use seeking for elegant turns of language to announce it; that is the plain fact. The lady, who is already well-known to you, has particularly commissioned me to give you the information; and when I tell you that she is no other than Miss Dora Barham, you may form

some idea of the happiness which gilds my future prospects. I believe the ceremony will be celebrated immediately on my return from Germany, or as soon after as can be conveniently arranged. You can imagine the pleasure with which I contemplate settling quietly at 'the Ferns' once more, with such a companion and friend; and I trust her anticipations are as pleasant and vivid as my own. Amongst these must, of course, rank very highly the opportunity it will afford of carrying on the friendly intercourse with your family, which has already been so conducive to our happiness in past years, and which it will be equally desirable and delightful to establish on a permanent footing for the future.

"With kind regards to your family circle,

"Believe me ever,

"Yours faithfully,

"CHARLES HUYTON."

It was well for Mr. Duncan's peace and

comfort, that loss of sight had prevented his taking cognisance of many things which must else have come to his knowledge: it was well, too, that he could not see his daughter's face, as she read this letter. The bitter irony of those words was concealed from him, but she felt it to her heart.

“Going to marry Dora!” said Mr. Duncan; “I am surprised. I thought he would have taken Isabel.”

She was silent; she could not speak; the effort to read through these words in an unbroken voice had been almost too great for her; she was now recovering herself as well as she could.

Mr. Duncan thought a little, and presently observed—

“Well, I am glad he has resolved to marry at last; and to have your young friend settled at ‘the Ferns’ will be pleasant for you, Hilary, as long as you stay in the neighbourhood.

You must write him an answer by and by, and we will tell him of your marriage, my child."

"Do you want me just now, my dear father?" said she, compelling herself to speak; "if not——"

"No—no, not at all at present; let Nest come to me in half-an-hour!"

Hilary escaped to her own room, carrying the cruel letter with her.

Engaged to Dora Barham! incredible! monstrous! could he ask her? could she accept him? it seemed impossible: where was Dora's love for Maurice? where Charles Hutton's knowledge of that love? Till this moment she had not known how much she had depended on her constancy; how completely she had built her hopes for her brother's happiness on some fortunate turn to their affairs. Well she knew how deep, how true, how tender were her brother's feelings, how entirely he had

surrendered his heart to this hapless affection ; and though aware that no engagement had passed between them, it seemed to her that their recent intercourse in London had increased their mutual attachment. Oh ! what could Dora mean then by thus abruptly abandoning him ! What would Maurice feel when he learnt her inconstancy ! If she had been sincere to him, if her sentiments had been real, where was her faith to Mr. Huyton ! by what name could an engagement with him be designated ! and if she had been all this time trifling with Maurice ! if she had been gratifying her own vanity at the expense of his happiness——but, that was impossible ! Dora was volatile, thoughtless, imprudent, but she was not deceitful, she was not heartless, she was not wicked. Hilary could not endure to think ill of her : there must be something unexplained ; there was some secret which had not reached her yet. Perhaps compulsion had won from her an un-

willing assent ; moral force, parental authority, domestic persecution, might have been employed ; she knew Dora was weak, possibly she had not the strength of will to withstand such influence ; she might rather deserve pity than blame.

But for Mr. Huyton himself, what excuse could be urged ! Maurice had been his chosen friend ; a hundred times had he made professions of regard, or declarations of esteem for him ; and he knew, or, at least, he was strongly suspicious of this esteemed friend's attachment to Dora Barham ! It was not a violent affection which misled him, and blinded his eyes ; Hilary believed him at the best, indifferent regarding Dora ; he had always rather despised her intellect, and slighted her charms ; no ! love for her was not his excuse : there was no love in that cruel letter which Hilary now held in her hands. As her eyes slowly perused the words again, her fancy presented to her mind the

terrible expression of his face when he had first heard of her own engagement. It seemed to ring in her ear once more, the bitter tone in which he had exclaimed, " You will wish rather that a demon had crossed your path than that you had thwarted me ;" and as she remembered this, she felt that it was revenge he sought ; a revenge for his slighted affection, which she could not choose but feel deeply.

The happiness of Maurice and Dora was sacrificed, perhaps, to her own ; it was her hasty marriage which had brought this impending grief on her darling brother !

" Oh, Maurice ! Maurice ! " sobbed she, as she buried her face on her hands ; " why am I to be a source of misery and disappointment to you ? Oh ! brother, you who have never done anything but comfort and love me, are your hopes now to be blighted for my sake ? Why did you love so truly and so well ? Why did you surrender that generous heart to one who

dared not own the affection she had created ! Was it a crime to love, that she should blush to be claimed by you ! Oh ! weak, foolish Dora, your idle, childish terrors have caused all this."

Very bitter the blow was, and rendered more so by the insulting tone in which the news had been announced. Could this be Charles Huyton, the man whom she had known so well, who had seemed so amiable, who had professed such love for her ! She shuddered as she contemplated such a character, and tried to persuade herself that she had fancied more than the truth. But yet in her secret soul there was something which told her otherwise ; which impressed on her the conviction that it was a bad, unholy feeling, now actuating her former lover, and that misery must be the result to those concerned.

Oh ! how she longed at that moment for the comfort of her husband's sympathy and love ;

how her heart ached to pour out its fears and sorrows to him, knowing that there they would be understood and borne with, and, perhaps, reasoned away. But this intense longing must be checked, put aside, kept under, or it would soon grow up into an overpowering cloud, darkening her hopes, numbing her feelings, paralyzing her actions, and obscuring from her the bright sunshine of trust and cheerful faith.

She turned her thoughts once more to Maurice and to Dora; but what could she do for them? Nothing but pray for them; and sinking on her knees, she did pray, long and earnestly, that if sorrow must come on her beloved brother, it might be borne with patience, and so bring a blessing with it: and for the others, too, she prayed, that the angry feelings might be softened, and the unkind intention converted into a better mood; that the weak might be strengthened, the erring restored; that they might both be saved from sinful weakness and sinful

passions ; and that if their own wilful ways brought suffering on them, that suffering might be sanctified to a happy result.

Little thought the angry and vindictive man for whom she prayed, of the only return she made to his unkindness ; and little deemed he, that if his cruel letter had given her pain, it had also afforded her the occasion of exercising faith, meekness, and charity ; that her soul rose the stronger for the blow which he had hoped would prostrate it.

She forgave him the injury he had, perchance, intended ; and to forgive from the heart is alone the blessed gift of that Spirit whose presence brings peace and consolation.

CHAPTER III.

“Let her have her proud dark eyes,
And her petulant, quick replies ;
Let her sweep her dazzling hand,
With its gesture of command,
And shake back her raven hair,
With the old imperious air.”

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT.

“So Charles Huyton is really going to marry Miss Dora Barham,” said Mr. Ufford to the party at the Vicarage. “I wonder whether she is satisfied now.”

“How did you hear that ?” was Hilary’s reply.

“Oh ! I had a letter from Huyton this morning, announcing his good fortune ; hoping

my poor brother would not take it amiss that he had succeeded where George had failed. I own I am more surprised, however, at Hutton's proposal than at the young lady's answer."

"You have not heard anything more from Italy, I suppose?" enquired Hilary, to whom the other subject was distasteful.

"I heard this morning, that Lord and Lady Rupert, that is, Dunsmore's sister-in-law and her husband, have left Florence, and must now be at Naples with my brother."

"I am glad of that," said Gwyneth, eagerly; "it will be a relief to your mind to know he has some one with him; and you like Lady Rupert, I think."

"Yes, I do not feel it so necessary to start immediately, and as George was so very anxious to hear that his projects are put *en train*, perhaps it would be better to make some definite arrangements regarding the church and school, at least, before I go."

Accordingly papers were produced, plans and estimates looked over, calculations made, and statistics gone into. In the midst of it all, whilst Gwyneth was busy noting down for Mr. Ufford some important calculations, and Hilary was explaining to her father the plan ultimately decided on, Gwyneth suddenly observed,

“I wonder Dora is going to marry before Isabel; I am so surprised that she should remain so long single. What do you suppose is the reason?”

“I really do not think such things are worth speculating about,” observed Mrs. Hepburn, who particularly wished to avoid the subject.

“Miss Barham’s position is peculiar,” said Mr. Ufford, “and so is her character. She is too proud to marry a mean man; too rich to marry a poor one; too great for a humble man; too clever for a foolish one; too independent for a mercenary man; and too good for a bad one.”

“ Well, that only proves that she must have a wise, good, clever, rich, and noble husband,” said Gwyneth, laughing a little ; “ and I suppose with so many claims, aided by the addition of grace and beauty, the probability that she might meet such a one is not very small.”

“ Perhaps ! but then, this wise, good, clever, rich, noble man may not perhaps submit to be governed by his wife ; and I have a notion that Miss Barham has been too long accustomed to be her own mistress, to like to give up the privilege, or to be at all ready to lay down her sceptre.”

“ Oh, you do not do her justice !” cried Gwyneth ; “ besides, any woman who loved, would resign all her prerogatives readily to one who deserved them.”

“ Gwyneth, my love ! have you finished those extracts ?” said her father.

Gwyneth went on with her work in silence.

“ There’s the Abbey carriage crossing the

green," observed Mr. Ufford, presently, he having sauntered away to the window, whilst the young ladies managed the details of business.

Hilary changed colour; she felt reluctant to meet Dora. "I had no idea they were in the country!" she observed, in a voice of discomfort.

"Only Miss Barham is," replied Mr. Ufford, looking with a little curiosity at Mrs. Hepburn's face. "Miss Dora is gone to visit some friends in Northampton, I believe with her aunt, Lady Margaret, whilst the happy Huyton is in Germany. The carriage is coming here!"

It did come, and Isabel entered the Vicarage exactly the same as ever in appearance; her sister's engagement had made no outward change in her. It had been a disappointment, but she was too well-bred to show it; and, except in a hasty abandonment of London,

there was no perceptible effect of the news. However, Dora herself could not be much more unwilling to discuss the affair than Isabel was, so it was a mutual accommodation that the sisters should part for the present. Miss Barham found herself suddenly weary of the London season, and much in want of rest and fresh air ; to face Hilary, to see Hurstdene, to exist even at home, Dora felt impossible ; and she arranged a hasty plan for accompanying her aunt into Northamptonshire, hoping that change of place and entire novelty would smother the thoughts which were burning in her heart, and diminish her regret, despair, and self-reproach.

Miss Barham was immediately interested in the details of the business which had just been occupying the others ; and both touched and grieved by the account of the precarious state of the first projector of the alterations. She had a right, she said, to be interested in any improvements of a church, which had so long

formed part of their family property, and she insisted on having it all detailed to her. Mr. Ufford accordingly went through the plans, whilst she listened with a most graceful and marked attention. Then she asked, in a pretty, injured tone, why her father had not been consulted; and was hardly appeased by the assurance that Mr. Barham having done so much for the chancel a few years ago, nothing more was required at present, nor could they feel justified in calling on him for assistance in a matter of ornament which was purely the wish of Lord Dunsmore.

“Was nothing more really wanted?” inquired Isabel; she should like to see the church, and judge for herself. She asked Gwyneth to walk down to it with her; Mr. Ufford, of course, accompanied them. They sauntered about there for a long time. Isabel was very enthusiastic, suggesting all sorts of expensive plans for ornament and effect; Mr. Ufford himself

was quite carried away by her zeal, entering into her ideas with almost equal warmth. It was a subject that exactly suited him ; ideal, imaginative, combining beauty, poetry, and all the unreal, sentimental, religious feeling, in which his spirit always delighted. He could arrange a symbolical device, and revel in an illustration of some fanciful theory, much better than he could go through a dry detail, or endure a self-denying, sober perseverance against ill-success.

Isabel was mistress of the elements of her subject ; she was acquainted with the fashionable theories and modern language of church architecture ; she could discourse elegantly on string-course, and reredos, lecterns, open-sittings, equality of ranks, chants, and responses : galleries and parish clerks were her aversion, and a choral service her delight. Gwyneth could think and feel, but Isabel could talk ; whilst the continued references to Mr. Ufford, to his

taste, opinion, wish, decision, not only compelled him to listen, but were so very flattering to his own self-love, as to convince him that hitherto he had greatly undervalued Miss Barham's good qualities.

They lingered long together, and when he had handed her into the carriage, and watched her drive off, he said a hasty farewell to the family at the Vicarage, and walked home, leaving the young ladies to put away his papers at their leisure.

Gwyneth was thoughtful and silent the rest of the day.

The curate came the next morning to the Vicarage soon after breakfast,; but hardly had poor Gwyneth time to be glad to see him, when her joy was dissipated by his words.

"Oh, Mrs. Hepburn, will you give me those plans and sketches for the new buildings? Mr. Barham wants to see them, and I am going over to the Abbey this morning, to consult about

them with him ; and shall probably not come back till to-morrow."

He went, and for some little time there was occasionally a change in his tone and manner towards Gwyneth Duncan ; his words were often few, and hurried ; there was no more loitering on the terrace, or dreaming over books of religious poetry with her. He did not absent himself from the Vicarage, but she was no longer always his object, even in the undecided and indolent way in which she had formerly been. His whole mind seemed engrossed in the decorations of the church, and things connected with it, including Miss Barham. Isabel promised a great deal towards providing funds ; the chancel was, of course, her peculiar care : and deeply interested as she was, it was natural that she should be constantly driving over, to see how the work progressed. There was scarcely a day in which it was not necessary that the curate and the lady should meet ; either at

Hurstdene to consult on the spot, or in the library at the Abbey, to examine books on decorative art, or illuminations copied from old MSS.

Hilary saw it all, and watched them with a careful eye. She often felt hurt at the proceedings, on her father's account, whose tastes and wishes were perpetually over-ruled; he did not like the idea of these new decorations, he feared that the quiet gray church, so dear to him in its serene simplicity, might assume too fanciful an appearance under their plans. The colouring of the walls and ceiling, talked of by them, he thought unsuitable. But he loved peace and hated dissension; and when Mr. Ufford argued on one hand, and Isabel coaxed on the other, he could not resist, but gave them their way.

As yet, however, the greater part of the decorations were only existing in idea; much repair was needed first, of a substantial and important character, and it appeared probable, that the autumn and winter must pass, before Fancy

could exercise her power on the coloured decorations and ornamental scrolls. Meanwhile, Isabel drew patterns, and Mr. Ufford applauded.

Gwyneth Duncan had at first noticed this unexpected coalition with considerable uneasiness; the fear she felt of Isabel as a rival, showed her how much her own feelings were interested in Mr. Ufford's. She wondered that nothing more was said of the journey to Italy, and wished most heartily that the curate had set out before Miss ~~Barham~~'s return to the country. By degrees, however, she became more easy; he resumed much of his old manner to her; when Miss Barham was not by, he sought her opinion, claimed her services, and courted her approval almost as much as formerly; and she began to hope that, however he might admire Miss Barham, or be flattered by her condescending notice, that his real preference was confined to her. She was very quiet, and more reserved than ever; not even her sister could penetrate her

secret; she never became demonstrative, least of all to him. .

Anxiety for Gwyneth's happiness, and concern for Mr. Ufford's uncertain conduct, were not the only sources of trouble to Hilary's mind at that time. Her thoughts would follow her absent sailors. Love would make the heart tremble, although faith whispered of patience and hope, and her husband's spirit, his devotion to the cause of duty, his calm courage and high aspirations, inspired her too: but yet they could not always check the intruding chills which woman's weakness threw over her. Generally, however, she was calm and trustful, although the blank of his absence was a sorrow which constant exertion, and devotion to the good of others, could alone alleviate. But for Maurice, poor Maurice, there were more painful thoughts still. His first letter was at once longed for, dreaded, and received with a mixture of feelings which it would be difficult to analyse.

The Erratic had remained some days at Plymouth, quite long enough for Hilary's letters, with the news of Dora's engagement, to reach her brother. She had written with the tenderest concern, the most sympathising sorrow, and yet, fearful of augmenting his disappointment, she had hardly dared to express what she really felt. To her husband she could confide all; but to Maurice, it seemed to her, that either to pity or to blame, to question Dora's past or her present feelings, to suppose her faithless or deceitful, untrue either to him or his rival, would be equally inappropriate, unkind, or unwise. She dared hardly do more than state facts, and express anxiety regarding his feelings. Then came his letter, like himself, generous, warm-hearted, high-minded, loving. He had, he said, no right to complain, she had broken no faith to him; he had asked for none; they had parted on the understanding that she was free, disengaged. He had never deserved her, and it

would be unjust, then, to claim a place in her memory, as any thing beyond a friend ; he had no wish to make her unhappy, and since their union appeared to her impossible, she was at perfect liberty to act as she had done. It was like herself, too, if she had endeavoured to please her father ; it was an engagement which he, no doubt, would perfectly approve ; and there was much offered by it to influence and tempt her beyond common inducements. That she would not marry for the sake of rank or fortune alone, she had already proved ; beyond a doubt, she had good reasons for her conduct. His most earnest wishes for her happiness, his constant prayers for her, were all he could now give ; these she should have. He charged Hilary not to allow her to suppose he felt ill-used, or that he judged her harshly, or blamed her ; nor need her affectionate heart grieve for him ; she had done him no injustice, no wrong ; and the inevitable evils of life he hoped he could bear.

A sailor must expect storms in his voyage, and should know what to do under them. A sudden tornado had come down on him, catching him, perhaps, with too much canvas spread, going on too gaily before a light breeze; but should he therefore give up all for lost, and allow the hurricane to overwhelm him without an effort? No, he would shorten sail at once, and trust, by vigorous and timely exertion, to remedy the danger to which incautiousness in fair weather had exposed him.

“Not that I can ever forget her,” continued he, in conclusion, “or am at all likely to find one to fill her place. Her memory will live in mine, as we think of one dead; and her name will ever have a charm for me beyond all other feminine appellations. But do not fret on my account, dear Hilary; you have enough care, without taking another load on your shoulders for my sake.”

But Captain Hepburn told his wife how great

was the struggle in the mind of Maurice, how severe the shock had been, and how glad he should be when they had left England, as this weary detention from day to day kept them all in an irritating state of idle uncertainty. Hilary knew Maurice must feel, yet his letter was a comfort too. If he could so bravely face his disappointment, the severity of the blow would be greatly lessened. If no angry feelings were lurking there, he would escape the bitterest portion of disappointed love ; and perhaps, after all, the abandoned lover might be less an object of pity than his successful rival.

Affairs went on at home, for some weeks, much as has been described. Isabel Barham was the most devoted friend to Gwyneth ; constantly at the Vicarage, to talk over the building plans, or consult about the embroidery she was occupied with for the church. Penelope's web hardly gave rise to more discussion and anxiety than did the cushions which Isabel thought she

was working. They travelled backwards and forwards, several times a week, between the Abbey and the Vicarage, in Miss Barham's britchska ; that young lady always expecting to find time to set a few stitches during her visit, and generally proving mistaken in the result ; so that the only progress the work made was when Gwyneth sometimes herself took it in hand : indeed, the cushions might be said to live chiefly on the road, if they had actually any other existence than in the imagination of their projectors.

The curate was not excluded from the cabinet councils held on these topics, and he rarely absented himself. None of the lookers-on could at all make out the meaning of the several parties ; even Hilary doubted what were Mr. Ufford's views and intentions ; and as to Miss Barham, when at Hurstdene, she seemed to care little for anything but the vicar's daughter. The accounts from Naples, meanwhile, were most un-

favourable ; there seemed scarcely a hope of Lord Dunsmore's life, which faded and flickered apparently like a dying lamp ; but as his sister-in-law and her husband were devoted to him, his brother was content to remain in England.

It was a wild and stormy day, such as not unfrequently breaks up the fine weather at the commencement of August ; the curate had not presented himself the whole morning at the Vicarage, and the family supposed him confined to his house by the tempest.

The church bell began to toll, and its long, mournful vibrations seemed to come sadly and awfully, with a warning sound, across the furious blast ; sometimes swelling loud in a transient lull, sometimes almost swept away by the violence of the roaring gale.

"That is old Martha Blake's funeral," observed Hilary ; "what a day for the poor people."

"Yes ; and Mr. Ufford, too," observed Gwyneth.

The bell tolled on, and by-and-bye Nest, who was watching from the window, remarked that the party had just appeared. Slowly, and with difficulty, the black group made their way across the green, the wind violently opposing their progress, and threatening every moment to overpower their feeble and tottering steps. Gwyneth's eyes were fixed on the procession as it wound its way along; she expected to see Mr. Ufford issue from the church to meet the mourners; but they paused at the Lych-gate, set down the corpse, and sheltered themselves as well as they could beneath the walls. It was evident the clergyman had not yet arrived: Five minutes passed; ten, a quarter of an hour; still the bell tolled on; and still the mourners stood huddled together by the gate of the dead.

"How wrong to keep those poor people waiting there," said Hilary, a little indignantly.

"I dare say there is some mistake about

time," replied Gwyneth ; " and I am sure they have often kept Mr. Ufford for an hour or more."

Still time went on ; at length, after a long hour, a messenger came to the Vicarage, to ask what should be done ; they had sent to Primrose Bank, but the clergyman was out, and had left word that he need not be expected back.

" Then I must go and bury my old parishioner," said the vicar, rising up. " Hilary, my hat and coat, please, love ; old Martin will guide me down to the church ; so do not disturb yourself."

Hilary was thunderstruck ; for her father to go out in such weather might be fatal ; he had not been so well as usual for some days. She knew not what to do ; ah, could she but have exposed herself for him ! Vain wish ; she watched him preparing with a sad presentiment, then resolutely threw on her own black cloak, and determined to accompany him. The storm

which he must encounter, she too would brave ; perhaps she might assist, or shelter him from its fury.

With many sorrowful charges from her to Gwyneth to have a fire lighted, and dry, warm clothes in readiness, the couple took their way together, although the father earnestly remonstrated against Hilary's exposing herself to such needless inconvenience. It was vain to attempt to hold an umbrella ; cloaks and petticoats flapped wildly in the wind, and caught the dashing torrents of rain as they fell ; but under the churchyard wall, there was a little shelter, and rain alone comparatively inconvenienced them, during the out-of-door service.

When it was over, Hilary, bidding the poor women, all so wet and draggled, to come up to the Vicarage to dry and warm themselves, hurried her father home, as fast as infirmity and tempest would allow him ; and wet, breathless, exhausted by the contest with the ele-

ments, they reached the house at last. But the struggle had almost overpowered him, and on his arrival, he was attacked by a sort of faintness which greatly alarmed his daughters. He revived after a short time, and smiled at their solicitude ; but although he seemed to rally, he complained once or twice in the evening of extreme chilliness, and before night it was quite evident he had caught a violent cold.

Morning did not bring the comfort which he had endeavoured to persuade his daughters would accompany it ; sore throat and fever were apparent, and Hilary, in great alarm, dispatched a hurried messenger for the doctor. Gwyneth was most miserable ; her father's illness overpowered her feelings, and that it should be caused by the apparent neglect of Mr. Ufford aggravated her distress. She wearied herself in inventing unsatisfactory excuses for his absence, each one of which was abandoned as unlikely, after being entertained for a

short period ; and the conviction that he would call that morning to excuse his absence, was so strong, that every moment she fancied she heard the latch of the wicket-gate.

The doctor came, prescribed for his patient, shook his head, and avoided giving a definite opinion ; contenting himself with observing, he had taken a chill, and they must make him better if they could. Hilary kept her own thoughts to herself, unwilling prematurely to alarm her sisters ; but she wrote to Sybil. The vacation was so near, that she thought Mrs. Farrington would easily arrange to hurry her departure, even if she were obliged to leave her husband behind for a few days.

The day passed heavily away ; the storm had ceased, but the sky was dull, and the earth damp and dreary ; and the exterior dullness was well answered by the blank within. All there was dull indeed.

Many parishioners came towards evening to

make anxious inquiries for their pastor, and Gwyneth had to see and answer them; and many and deep, though not loud, were the murmurs that his reverence, who never spared himself, should have been forced out in such a storm, through the inattention of one, who—Gwyneth had to stop them abruptly, to charge them not to judge hastily, to make excuses, and invent possible reasons for the mistake; which sometimes brought her such an answer as,

“Ah, well, miss, I dare say you doant like to hear ’um blamed, but ’ees not like his reverence, and will never fill his shoes.”

An observation which brought the colour into her cheeks more than once.

“Belike, miss, ye doant know Mr. Ufford was gone over to the Abbey yesterday?” said one old gossip to her; to which Gwyneth replied, with as much unconcern as possible, she did not: but there was something in the tone and manner which startled her.

The second morning of Mr. Duncan's illness brought Gwyneth a note from Isabel. She was sitting with Hilary beside her father's bed, when it was placed in her hand. She opened and read it; then silently laying it down before her sister, she left the room.

Mrs. Hepburn hurriedly perused it. It was to announce, in most graceful and well-chosen words, the fact that she was engaged to Mr. Ufford. She was sure the intelligence would interest her friends at the Vicarage.

Hilary had hardly time to understand this announcement, and none at all to calculate its effects on Gwyneth, when her attention was called to her father. He awoke suddenly, in such intense pain, that every thought had to be given to his relief. She was obliged to summon more help, and Gwyneth, hearing the subdued bustle, came out of her room. Her countenance was white as marble, and almost as composed as a statue; there was no other sign of

emotion than the shadow under her eyes ; her whole attention was devoted to her father ; and her energy was astonishing. The alarm of the daughters was great, though intensely quiet ; and an urgent message was sent to the apothecary to come immediately. Much to their relief, he was met near the house, and hurried forwards. Every application which skill could devise, or care employ, was made use of to relieve the patient ; but for hours the sisters, though working with untiring energy, saw no beneficial result. At length, however, there came a cessation of pain, followed by sleep.

Now Gwyneth insisted Hilary should rest. She had been up the whole of the preceding night ; she must take repose. Gwyneth's black eyes burned with a fever fire as she spoke ; her cheeks were white, but her hand did not tremble, nor her lip falter.

"And you, Gwyneth," said Hilary, kissing her, as she listened to her low, yet impressive whispers ; "do you not want rest?"

“No, not now, not yet; when I am tired I will rest, but it would be useless to try now, and I would rather be doing something.”

“There are carriage wheels,” said Hilary, listening. Gwyneth’s face flushed for one moment, but the colour died away as her sister said: “It must be Sybil!”

It was Sybil, not alone either; she was accompanied by her husband’s uncle, a physician whom she had brought with her from London, a gentleman they all knew and liked exceedingly. The relief which the sight of the travellers afforded was very great; but as the patient was sleeping quietly, there was nothing else to be done but to welcome and refresh them.

Mr. Wild, the apothecary, was to call again in an hour or two; he had already hinted at the propriety of calling in more advice, and would, no doubt, be glad to have Dr. Symons to share his responsibility.

The sisters clustered together round the drawing-room fire, for the evening was so chilly, that the travellers were glad of its warmth, and spoke in low, anxious tones of their hopes and fears. Sybil's indignation at the cause of this illness was less suppressed than her sisters; and murmurs of "careless," "thoughtless," "unpardonable," crossed her lips.

Then came Mr. Wild again, and a consultation between him and the physician; and then the sinking spirits with which they listened to the faint encouragements and doubtful words of the doctors. However, it was no time to give way; feeling and fear must be crushed down into the smallest possible space, anticipation must be prohibited, action and energy were what were now required. Gwyneth took the watch; her sisters were to sleep, and they could sleep all the more quietly, knowing that Dr. Symons was within call, if necessary.

There was scarce a shadow of amendment the

next day, to cheer them ; but there were no worse symptoms in the sick man ; he slept much and heavily in the night, but when awake, pain was lessened, and consciousness more alive. The day passed in slow hours, marked by the changes in the sick room, as one sister after the other took her seat beside the bed. Gwyneth's restlessness increased hourly, when not stationed there ; nothing else seemed to afford her a moment's quiet. Whatever of active exertion was required, she was the doer of it ; she never tired, except of being unemployed, and her quickness of eye, readiness of thought, and lightness of finger, were much praised by Dr. Symons, who little guessed the source whence this unfailing activity sprung.

It was on the afternoon of Saturdāy, the third of Mr. Duncan's illness, when, as Gwyneth was crossing the vestibule, the pleasant sunshine streaming in at the open door, tempted her for a short space to pause in the

porch. She lingered a minute, the next, as she turned away, a step caught her ear; it was Mr. Ufford. Her first inclination was to draw back, her next, and the governing one, was to advance composedly with extended hand.

There was, perhaps, a little confusion in his countenance as he looked at her; a little surprise at the deadly whiteness of her cheeks, the strange glance of her dark eyes, as he greeted her.

"You have been long coming," said she, gravely; "my father has asked for you several times."

"I am sorry; I am but just returned from the Abbey. I will go to him now!" It was said in great confusion and haste.

"No, you cannot, he is asleep now, Sybil just told me so; and Dr. Symons would not have him disturbed for the world." She spoke with an effort; she dared scarcely allow her breath to come, lest it should overpower her

self-command. Each nerve was stretched, each muscle rigid in the exertion to seem calm.

“Asleep—Dr. Symons! — Good heavens! what is the matter?” inquired he, startled into forgetting his own concerns, and really thinking of her words.

“Do you not know?” she paused. “Walk in, I will tell you when I can!” another pause, during which she tried to strangle some heaving sobs, she overpowered some rebellious flutterings. “I think I will call Hilary!” she added, quickly, as a last resource, and hurried away from the room door. He entered. Nest was there alone. She rose, but would hardly speak, or come forward.

“What is the matter, Nest?” exclaimed he, abruptly.

“Papa is no better,” replied the child, looking down; “no better at all; and Dr. Symons, who came here yesterday, does not know how to make him better, and Sybil says, Mr. Ufford, it is all your fault!”

“ My fault !” cried he ; “ how in the world ? what have I to do with it ?”

“ Your being away, and obliging him to go out on Wednesday to the funeral, in all that storm ; nobody knew where to find you, so poor papa had to do it himself.”

A very unpleasant conviction accompanied the light which his understanding received by Nest’s plain speaking. He coloured, sat down, and was silent for some minutes.

“ How long has he been ill ?” said he, at last.

“ Ever since Wednesday evening, when he caught cold ; but here is Hilary.”

Mr. Ufford rose, feeling singularly uncomfortable and embarrassed.

“ I cannot tell you how shocked I have been, Mrs. Hepburn, to hear of Mr. Duncan’s sudden illness,” said he ; “ I had no idea of it !”

“ Did you not receive a message from me ? we sent yesterday to beg you would come as soon

as you could, as my father asked for you several times."

"I am but just returned from the Abbey!"

Hilary was silent and grave. Her looks were more of a reproach than any words she could have uttered; they spoke so plainly of grief, anxiety, and patience. He felt obliged to say something in excuse or apology; and with ever-increasing embarrassment, he said:

"I am so sorry it should have happened; but I quite forgot the notice, and all about the funeral—it was most unfortunate!"

Still Mrs. Hepburn was silent.

"My housekeeper ought to have reminded me, when I told her I was going out," continued he; "it was excessively careless of her to forget; I shall speak to her about it."

"If you usually depend upon her for those sort of things—" began Hilary, and then stopped suddenly.

"Besides, who could ever have supposed that

people would be so mad as to go out in such weather at all?" added he, determined to be angry with somebody. "Those old women have no more sense than a post; it was most irrational, and I really think they must have intended to vex and annoy me."

"I think they are hardly to blame for keeping an appointment," said she; "they could not tell you would not be there, and, perhaps, were as much inconvenienced by the weather as you could have been, had you been present."

"I don't know that; they are used to rough it; and there is a sad spirit of spite and ill-will prevalent amongst them; a more selfish, ungrateful, thankless, obstinate set, I never met with. They are equally devoid of sense and affection."

"You do them injustice, I am sure; you would not doubt their affectionate feeling, if you heard their anxiety for my father. But I cannot stay with you now. Can you wait here on the

chance of my father's waking, or will you call in again by-and-bye?"

Mr. Ufford was too glad to make his escape at that moment, and promising to call again in an hour's time, he walked off, trying to drown his own sense of wrong, by throwing the blame on everybody in the parish except himself.

Mr. Duncan's attack proved an influenza of a most dangerous nature; and no skill or care from physicians or nurses, could arrest its progress or prevent its effects. He lingered on for nearly three weeks, and then darkness and silence fell on the Vicarage, sorrow and tears filled the village dwellings, for the father was taken from his children, and the pastor from his people, and the place that had known him would know him no more.

The sisters sat together in the gloomy rooms during those long summer days which intervened between the death and the funeral, each, perhaps, going over in silence in her own mind

the scenes of childhood so deeply impressed on memory ; the happy hours, the kindly-given lesson, the birth-day treat, the pleasant surprise, all coming from him who was now gone from them ; each one a joy that never could recur again, but which, although now receding into the shadowy regions of the past, was yet even in recollection a thing to be valued and to be grateful for.

They had some great comforts also. Mr. Paine and his wife contrived to come to them, and he was dearly welcomed, both as friend and priest, and she was an unspeakable solace to Hilary. Their brother-in-law had joined them the week after Sybil came, and his presence relieved them of the painful intrusions which funeral arrangements give rise to.

Hilary knew that support and comfort would come alone from a higher source than earthly friendship, or domestic affection ; but the gift of these latter was received as a favour to deserve

gratitude, a token that He who provided even for temporal blessings, would not forsake his children, nor withdraw from them the necessary help.

Her greatest anxiety was for Gwyneth now; and, perhaps, her bitterest sorrow was caused by Mr. Ufford.

The latter, indeed, had deeply disappointed her by the coldness and reserve which, like a damp, wrapping mist, had crept over him. His visits had been few and hurried, except when absolutely sent for; his words cold, stiff, and unwillingly given. His time was principally devoted to riding over to the Abbey, which swallowed up most days in the week. His own prospects, of course, chiefly occupied him, and, no doubt, the visits at the Vicarage were painful for more than one reason; yet, when they remembered the past, their father's kindness to him, his previous conduct, and friendly professions, and his connection with their sad loss,

they all felt that something more was due from him than they received; perhaps he, too, was secretly conscious of ingratitude, which made the sight of former friends unpleasant; perhaps he was simply self-engrossed, and thoughtless regarding the sorrows which did not touch him.

But Gwyneth was a nearer, deeper trouble, and Hilary could not look at her without fear. The same stony composure wrapped her still. Ever since her father's death she had shed no tear; but her dark eyes looked blacker than ever by contrast with her white cheeks; she spoke little, never of her feelings; she rested little; but with a strange, untiring energy, she seemed always engrossed by some object for the good of the others. An ordinary observer would never have guessed the amount of agony and endurance that pallid brow concealed; but Hilary read it in her silence, in her downcast eyes, and in the burning touch of her fevered

fingers, and she read it with fear ; for such unnatural suppression of feeling, such intense and over-wrought calmness must, she knew, break down at last : and what would be the end of it ?

CHAPTER IV.

“Chill blows the wind, the pleasaunce walks are drear,
Madcap, what jest was this to meet me here !
Were feet like those made for so wild a way ?
The southern chamber had been, by my fay,
More fitting trysting-place for us to-day !”

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT.

MRS. HEPBURN'S fears for her sister were not immediately realized ; for weeks there was no symptom of the reaction she had dreaded. Gwyneth threw herself with a passionate energy into all the preparations, the business and the distressing bustle which must follow the decease of a clergyman. The necessity of leaving the

home of their whole life, the doubts where to go ; the troublesome technicalities of dilapidations, and other matters of the same kind ; the anxiety regarding what Maurice would wish done in his absence ; the misery of parting with all the treasured relics which a family mansion contains ; of knowing that all they had loved and valued must pass into other and careless hands, painful as these were, did not daunt her spirit. Her one wish was to leave the place ; her answer, when Hilary begged her not to overtire herself, was generally " I cannot rest at Hurstdene."

No, she could not rest there, now she knew that she must, eventually, leave it ; now that her pleasant visions had been so rudely overthrown ; that her day-dreams had proved more evanescent than the sunset glory on the tree-tops ; rest in *his* house, she could not ; knowing, as she did, that he only waited for their quitting it, to pull down the whole, from ridge-

tile to door-sill. Rest there ! where he, who was now whispering soft things to another, had once said and looked such words, such meanings to herself, as she dared not now recal. She was incessantly urgent to be gone ; but nothing would persuade her to go first ; she would not yield so far as to seem unable to remain. Sybil took Nest back to London with her, Gwyneth remained with Hilary.

The marriage of Mr. Barham's daughters was approaching ; one ceremony was to unite the two couples, and the country round re-echoed with gossip on the subject. The owner of ' the Ferns ' was at home, Dora, too, had returned to Drewhurst Abbey ; all there looked as bright and gay, to outward seeming, as the affairs at the Vicarage shewed dull and sad. The black crape of the mourners, and the orange wreaths of the young brides, were but the symbols of the apparent contrast between their present prospects.

Yet, perhaps, all was not as it seemed ; there might be throbbing hearts and wrung feelings under the folds of the richest brocades ; there might be bitter tears in secret, shed over the elegant baubles which custom dedicates as fitting presents for a wedding ; there might be a shadow upon the mental vision, through whose thick gloom the bridal finery might appear but as a ghastly mockery, more fearful, more dismal, than a funeral pall.

And there are consolations for unselfish mourners, which bear up the heart, and support the drooping spirit, and make the feeble strong ; sweet thoughts of peace, which fill the void that death occasions, and make even memory a comfort and a blessing, though it calls up scenes never to be repeated here. No, the parting which a hopeful death occasions, is not the darkest shadow in this world of sorrow !

Isabel Barham in due time paid a visit of

condolence to her friends at the Vicarage. Hilary met her alone, Gwyneth was busy, and did not appear. Miss Barham seemed really touched as she saw Mrs. Hepburn's pale cheeks and black garments; perhaps the contrast of their present situations struck her, perhaps she remembered how much of pain and sorrow had followed Hilary, since the time when she had been a bride. She spoke kindly and affectionately, and enquired with great interest as to their intentions.

"We shall leave this next week," said Hilary. "Maurice and Captain Hepburn are both desirous we should be nearer the southern coast, and we think of a house not very far from Southampton. Mr. Farrington has a sister settled there, and though we should not like to live in a town, it would not be convenient to be very far from one."

"Then we shall lose you quite, I fear; I was

half in hopes we should have had you settled in this neighbourhood still. I was talking to Mr. Huyton about Primrose Bank for you, but he did not seem much to like it."

"Thank you for thinking of us ; but to have us within an easy distance of either London or Portsmouth is my husband's object, and Southampton unites both. He and my brother are my sister's guardians, and we shall, I hope, always continue to live together."

"That will be very nice ; and Hilary, you will not mind my asking as a friend, you will be comfortable as to circumstances — income I mean ?"

"Yes, we shall do very well ; we have never been accustomed to luxury, and we shall not have much to resign of that kind."

"I see you have been packing up," said Isabel, looking round.

"Yes, such things as we take with us ; Mau-

rice would like us to keep all, but there is much it would not be worth while to move. He has left it entirely to my discretion."

"And this will be my farewell visit then ; I am afraid I shall be too much occupied to come again. By the by, Dora told me to ask if you would see her ; I wanted her to come with me, but she had some scruples, I could not understand what, and only sent a message."

"Yes, I should," said Hilary with warmth, "I should indeed like to see her, pray tell her so. How is Lord Dunsmore now ; have you better accounts of him ?"

A shade passed over Isabel's face.

"Why, the accounts lately have spoken of his being better ; he has seemed to rally a little since the death of his child, but those sort of partial revivals are not uncommon in pulmonary complaints, and I cannot imagine

that, ill as he has been, he has any real chance of recovery."

"I thought," observed Hilary, "that it was doubtful whether his was a pulmonary attack."

"I believe one or two physicians pretended to doubt it," replied Isabel, a little impatiently ; "but the most eminent declared it hopeless, and no one could see him, I should suppose, and question his having every appearance of a victim to consumption."

"Can I not see Gwyneth?" continued Isabel, after a pause.

"I will try to find her, if you will excuse me for a few minutes."

Hilary had no little difficulty in persuading her sister to appear ; she made some excuses about business and unfitness of dress, but finally yielded, with the air of one who resigns herself to walking to the stake. Her heart revolted from meeting her successful rival, and when she remembered the visits of former days,

when her company had been assiduously sought as a screen and an excuse for other interviews, when she had been made so unconsciously to administer to her rival's objects, and her own disappointment, it did require no small share of resolute fortitude to go through the ordeal before her.

It was borne, however, as many other trials had been borne, by putting away thought and feeling, by avoiding to scan her own sensations, and simply taking pains to do the present duty rightly ; as a traveller amongst precipices, on a narrow path, refuses to look down into the unguarded gulf below him, and keeps his faculties steady, by engaging every one in the task of setting the next footstep safely.

The next day, as Hilary was busily engrossed in writing, she thought she heard a step behind her, and looking round, saw, to her surprise, Dora Barham standing there alone.

Apparently she had just ridden over from

the Abbey, but her hat was thrown off, and her long hair was hanging somewhat disordered down her pale cheeks, whilst she stood, with parted lips, and fixed eyes, and hands half-raised, as if hesitating whether to speak, or to retire.

“Dora, dear Dora !” said Hilary, holding out her hands. In another moment, Dora was in her arms, hiding her face upon her shoulder, and sobbing out incoherent words of tenderness, sorrow, and self-reproach. Her friend did not speak, but caressed her softly, and waited until this ecstasy was over, well knowing, from experience, that Dora’s moods were somewhat changeable.

At length she raised her head, and with downcast eyes, and tears trembling on the lashes, she asked, in an agitated voice, “Oh, Hilary ! what do you think of me ?”

“That you are very kind to come and see me, dear,” replied Mrs. Hepburn, smiling gently.

“ Ah, well! perhaps it is wisest to say nothing of the past, we will talk of something else. This dear old place, this happy, happy, room, that beloved garden. Oh, Hilary, Hilary! my heart will break.”

“ It is very painful to leave it,” replied Hilary; “ it is always hard to give up scenes to which the heart clings, and I understand Mr. Ufford means to pull it all down, and build a new and larger vicarage. He can hardly make it grand enough for your sister’s habits, without making it too grand for the living.”

“ I dare say not,” said Dora, abstractedly. “ You have removed the pictures?” Her eye had sought for one portrait which used to hang in that room.

“ Yes, most things are packed up, ready for removal: we go ourselves very soon.”

“ Ah, me! ah, me! and how is—how are your sailor friends?” Her cheeks varied from red to white.

“ Well, quite well.”

“ Hilary !”

“ Well, dear, what ?”

“ Tell me ! oh, tell me !—in another week I may not ask, or even think of him,—tell me now in mercy—” she put her hand to her head.

“ Yes, but what am I to tell you, Dora ? he is well, quite well.”

“ Tell me what he thinks of me ; tell me, or I shall go mad ! Does he hate me, despise me, as an idle, giddy, trifling, coquette, a heartless, ambitious girl, content to sell my hand and person ? Does he not loathe me from his heart ? He must, he cannot help it.”

“ No, indeed.”

“ Has he mentioned my name to you ? what did he say ? what *could* he say, but words of contempt and scorn !”

“ No, neither contempt nor scorn ; far from it, he says — I will read you what he

says ;” and turning to her desk, Hilary presently produced the letter containing the allusions to Dora’s marriage. She read his message, whilst Dora, listening, held her breath, as if afraid to lose a word.

“ Good, noble, honourable Maurice, too good, too kind,” said she at length, “ happy, happy for you that you are not bound to so worthless, so feeble a creature as I am ! Ah ! I am glad, glad, most glad that you are not miserable. Read it again, Hilary, once more ; or no, let me see for once, only once, his blessed writing.” She caught the letter from her friend, and began to read it herself. Mrs. Hepburn remonstrated, but Dora held the letter with both hands, and read, eagerly devouring the words with her eyes, and totally deaf to her companion’s voice. Then, when she had done, she passionately kissed the paper, pressed it to her heart, looked at it again ; and again, with streaming eyes, put her lips to the signature.

“Wretch, wretch that I am!” she cried, frantically, “oh, Hilary! I shall die, my heart will break, I know I shall; I often have a burning pain here in my bosom, or my head, which cannot last; iron, flint, granite, breaks or pulverizes; surely human life is not harder, not more tenacious than those. Tell me, shall I not die?”

“Yes, Dora, one day; we must all die once: but death is a solemn thing, not to be met unprepared; and these wild and passionate expressions are not a fitting preparation for this great reality. Give me back that letter.”

“No, let me keep it; it is mine, for me, concerns me most.”

“You must not, Dora; remember, you are to be another man’s wife next week.”

“Next week! ah! when I am, I will send it to you; let me keep it now.”

“To keep it now ought not to be any object

to you. Give it me back. If you value it, you must not retain it; if you do not, you will not wish to keep it."

"Till the last—till my—my wedding-day!" said she with a ghastly smile.

"If you wish for happiness, if you value peace, return it!"

"Happiness! Peace! we have long parted company—I lost them when the Erratic sailed; happiness, as the wife of a man who does not care for me—for whom I have no regard; peace with a husband who weds me whilst his heart is another's, knowing, too, that mine is pre-engaged; who seeks me from pique; whom I have accepted from cowardice. Yes, ours will be a home of happiness and peace, the hearth of domestic felicity, the very centre of all true and happy virtues."

"Dora! Dora! how can you talk so!" cried Hilary, shocked and dismayed.

“Talk ! ask me how I can act so ! what does talking signify ! ah me !”

“But, Dora, is it possible that with such sentiments, such feelings, you can be really going to marry ? oh, think before you take an irrevocable step ; before you deceive yourself and him, too far !”

“I am not deceiving him, Hilary ; he knows what he is about ; come, I will tell you all, only listen.”

She threw herself on the ground at her friend's feet, her favourite attitude, and poured out her story.

“We parted coldly, I was offended, vain, foolish thing ! I misunderstood the very devotion of his heart ; then came Charles Huyton, tempting me with wily words. I knew he did not love me. I knew it was you he worshipped ; I saw through his motive, and trusting that he would himself weary of so unsuitable a union, I said yes ! I was mad—provoked ; but I did not mean

it, I thought I should have escaped. But I knew not his resolution in evil ; his stern purpose, his dark determination ; day after day have the toils closed round me ; the net in which I wound myself has entangled me more. I cannot shake myself free ; he *will* marry me ; and I cannot, dare not, say *no*. Oh, Hilary ! do you know his dark expression, did you ever see how his eyes can glow and sparkle with gloomy fire ? Once I did not dislike him ; now I dread him beyond measure, and compared with Maurice ! don't tell him how miserable I am, it would make him sad ; at least, not till it is over ! when I am dead, then, then, tell him that my heart was broken. Ah, Hilary !”

“Dear Dora ! what can I say to you ? do not go on with this ; not for Maurice, not for his sake, but for your own. For your conscience, your honour, your virtue, do not risk all by such a fatal step. Think, pray—pray for strength, for light, for guidance, and stop before it is too late.”

“Pray ! what, when about to do what is so wrong ?” murmured Dora ; “ would such prayers be heard ? ”

“ Yes ; prayer to do better, to have grace to repent ! prayer is always heard. ”

“ Nay, then, I will pray for death ! that would be the greatest boon to me. ”

“ Dora, if you had stood as I so recently did by a death-bed, if you had witnessed how solemn a thing it is to prepare to render up the soul, how the weakness of the body prostrates the powers of the mind, and how even the humblest, truest faith, does not exclude bitter penitence for failings long past, and errors known besides only to the Great Creator, you would not, you could not, wish to rush unprepared to such a solemn work as dying. Think, Dora, if after such a life as my father’s, there was so much regret for misspent moments, such humble acknowledgment of unfulfilled duties, think what it would be to face our end, because we are too

weak to suffer for the truth ; what madness to call on death to save us from earthly fears, and dare to face our Judge, because we will not do our duty here, from dread of a fellow-creature's censure ! oh, Dora, consider !”

“Tell me about your father, Hilary,” said Dora, in a broken voice, and hiding her eyes against her friend's knees ; and Mrs. Hepburn thinking that, perhaps, to turn her thoughts from herself might be useful, related such particulars of Mr. Duncan's death-bed as she believed might soothe and interest her auditor. She was seriously alarmed for Dora's state of mind. There was a restlessness in her eyes, a nervous twitching of her muscles, a variation in her complexion, and other similar symptoms, which she thought indicated extreme mental excitement ; and her wildly variable manner, her sudden changes of subject in conversation, and her extraordinary tones, confirmed these fears. She appeared, so far as Hilary could judge, like

one on the brink of a violent fever ; and the thought passed through her mind, that, perhaps, the marriage she so deeply deprecated, might, after all, be arrested by causes over which even Mr. Huyton had no control.

Dora sat for some time profoundly silent, and, except for the occasional deep heaving of her breast, quite composed outwardly. At length, when Mrs. Hepburn ceased speaking, she slowly rose, and after kissing her two or three times, she walked away to the window, and stood there looking out in silence. Then she said, but without turning round :

“ Hilary, if there is one person whose influence could induce Charles Huyton to break off this hateful marriage, one who could soften his heart, and lead him to have pity on me, on Maurice, on himself, it is *you*. If you would intercede for us !”

“ Dora,” said Hilary, hurriedly interrupting her, “ you mistake ; you are not thinking of

what you are saying. I can have no such power as you suppose; and for me to interfere in any way with him, would be alike useless and impossible. I can do you no good."

"Ah, you do not know—his former feeling for you is still——"

"Hush, Dora; if former feeling for me exists, it is an insult and a wrong to hear of it; an insult to me, a wrong to my husband. What influence could the wife of Captain Hepburn exercise over the mind of Mr. Huyton, in such a cause?"

"It might not be a wrong influence; I meant no harm! I know that, though angry at your marriage, he still looks up to you, respects you, esteems you above all other women; and a word from you, such as you have spoken just now to me, would, perhaps, awaken him to a sense of right and wrong, might arouse some remorse and repentance, before it is too late."

"Dear Dora, I believe you to be most entirely

mistaken ; and even could I with propriety speak, the opportunity may never occur, and your conduct, your decision, ought not to depend upon the chance of my speaking, or the possibility of my influencing him. Act for yourself ; follow your own sense of duty, and dare to be true even at last."

Dora sighed heavily, and turned away. More Hilary said to the same purpose, but in vain ; Miss Barham continued uncertain and miserably undecided, and when at length she quitted the Vicarage, it was with no assurance that she would not, after all, pursue the dangerous road that she was treading.

Her last words were :

"Oh, Hilary, why did you not love and marry him, then we might all have been happy !"

The sisters' residence at the Vicarage was rapidly drawing to a close. A long farewell had been said to every well-known forest nook and glade,

each beloved haunt of bygone days : a sad leave had been taken of each parishioner, each lowly friend and affectionate well-wisher, many parting tokens had been humbly but kindly offered, from those who had known them from childhood, or begged as precious memorials of the late Vicar and his daughters, by the sorrowful parishioners, who still grieved for their best friend. The last Sunday came, and they knelt for the last time on the spot where for years their devotions had been offered up. Every look was now a pain, every action almost caused a pang, and both sisters ardently wished the time were come, which should put an end to the sorrowful dream in which they now seemed to move. There was no outward demonstration of their grief, it wore the calm, grave, torpid aspect, that a dull November day presents, when the sky is all shrouded in a sombre veil of grey, and the distant hills wear the same heavy tint; whilst no wind moves through the half-bare trees, or wakens the waters

to life. Over such a scene silence and stillness brood, the silence of death-like sleep, made only more apparent as the soft rustle of a falling leaf catches the ear, or the eye is attracted by its movement, as it calmly floats to the dull earth beneath.

The afternoon of Monday, the last afternoon they were to spend in their old home, Hilary walked down alone, to visit for the last time the graves of those so dear to her, and look once more on the favourite spot where many a peaceful hour had been spent.

She walked slowly and softly all round the western end of the church, scanning its grey tower, and casting loving glances at each well-known window. The workmen had not been there for several days, but their poles and scaffolding encumbered the place, and spoke of decay and change, of old things being replaced by new, of all passing away and being forgotten in turn. Her mind went off to scenes where

change is unknown,—where rust and moth do not invade,—where decay comes not,—where, blessed thought ! distance is not, separation cannot grieve, where there is no more sea ! Her thoughts were with her husband then, as she must, at least in idea, share all gentle, happy thoughts, with him ; but her hopes were not bounded by earth ; they had gone on into futurity, and time seemed but an atom in space, whilst she gazed on the vast prospect of eternity.

Slowly and softly she trod over the grass, among the graves of hundreds who had loved, and suffered, and wept as she had, and then lain down to sleep and be forgotten. She passed the northern transept, and turning the corner, came forwards, with inaudible footsteps, to the eastern end. She was startled suddenly from her reveries, for there, under the old lime-tree, whose yellow leaves now thickly strewed the ground, stood one whom she little thought to see there.

at such a time ; Charles Huyton was beside her father's grave.

Roused by her footsteps, he looked up suddenly, and starting as he saw her, he raised his hat, with an air of almost haughty defiance, but stood still.

Old memories flashed thick and fast on each, as they stood there once more together, and their eyes wandered away to the church wall, and to the Virginian creeper, whose long sprays still showed some crimson leaves clinging to their parent stem, waiting their turn to fall to rest. Then their looks met, and they each aroused themselves to speak.

“ Mr. Huyton,” said she, advancing a step, “ we are both changed since we stood here once before ; and after all that has passed, there is, perhaps, no spot on earth so appropriate as this, for us to part. Here, by the grave of one who loved you, and whom I know you you must have esteemed and valued in return,

let us bury all that may have caused pain to either, and exchange a farewell and forgiveness together."

"I do not agree with you," replied he, coldly, and making no offer to receive her hand; "it does not appear to me that any two people on this earth can have less reason to wish to speak, or that a spot so unfortunate for a meeting could be found."

She was silenced for a time; he stood gloomily looking at her; at length she said, very gently:

"We leave this place to-morrow morning, and I am come now to pay a last, a final visit, to this solemn spot. Need I say more, or must I ask you, as a gentleman, not to intrude on a seclusion so sacred; not to persecute me here with unkind and unholy emotions!"

"Have I wronged you, Mrs. Hepburn, that you talk of forgiveness?" said he, sternly.

"If *your* conscience can acquit you, Mr.

Huyton, it is not necessary for me to recal unpleasant recollections. Do not let us discuss the subject."

"Forgiveness implies a sense of injury," persisted he ; "I have a right to know how I have incurred the charge."

"When we last parted," said she, after a pause, looking at him with gentle eyes, "you asked earnestly and urgently to be considered as my friend. What have I done since, to cause this change in you ; that now, when we are parting, perhaps for ever, you will not say one kindly word ; will not bid me good speed, nor let me give you my good wishes ?"

"If my memory serves me rightly, you refused those urgent entreaties, you declined decidedly, the friendship which I offered. Am I to conclude that your refusal was insincere, and that you wished to keep me at your feet, even whilst you affected to repulse me ?"

"You are cruelly unjust, Mr. Huyton," was

her answer; "I told you that intercourse between us must cease, until—I am sure you must remember the condition:—nor have I even now, when that condition is about to be fulfilled, the slightest wish to carry on the acquaintance, I only asked for an exchange of parting words; and my only wish now is, that you should leave me in peace. At least, do not profane this spot with bitter words. I pray Heaven to bless you, and lead you to true happiness here and hereafter."

"Yes, the condition *is* about to be fulfilled," repeated he, as if in a dream; then starting, he said, with more animation: "And the fulfilment of this condition then meets your entire approbation?"

He fixed his eyes on her with a piercing glance, under which she shrank and coloured. "The choice you would not make yourself, you approve of for your friend, do you?"

"If you think you can make Dora happy,

Mr. Huyton, if that is your wish, your determination, all your friends and hers must approve of your choice."

"Happy!" repeated he, scornfully, "oh, yes! very happy; as happy as she deserves, and you know how much that is. Tell me now truly," coming a step closer to her, "would you rather see the object of your idolatry, of your passionate devotion, happy with another, forgetful of your affection; or know her miserable, but constant at heart?"

"Real, devoted affection must wish its object to be happy; it is a very selfish love which can endure no pleasure which it does not share," said she, gravely.

He seemed to be pondering her words, then answered: "That may be woman's love; a man's is different. I do not believe the man exists who would make such a choice."

"I know you are mistaken," she said, and her looks told him where her thoughts had flown.

“Answer me one other question,” said he ;
“I know you cannot choose, but answer sincerely.
Tell me, has my intended marriage occasioned
you either pain or pleasure ?”

She hesitated. Dora’s wild words crossed her
mind. Would her answer have any influence
on her friend’s fate ? could it be that he regretted
the grief he had occasioned, and would repair it
even now ?

“Speak, I implore you,” added he, as she
waited to consider.

“Would my reply make any difference in the
result ? would the knowledge of my opinion in-
fluence your conduct ?” she asked, looking up
at him.

“Try,” said he ; but it was with an expres-
sion of eye she did not like.

“No, I will not. I see no good could come
of the answer !”

“Thank you, that is enough !” said he, with
a bitter smile ; “I know that could Hilary Dun-

can have expressed any pleasure or even unconcern, she would have done so at once ; and I do not suppose Hilary Hepburn is less sincere."

She coloured again, and after a momentary hesitation, she said : " I believe you may be right in your inference, but the cause of the pain must be unknown to you."

" Is it ? do not fear that I should attribute it to piqued feminine vanity, or disappointment of a selfish triumph, which would gladly retain the love it does not return. I know you better than that. I know that thoughts of self did not mingle with your pain ; the disappointment Dora's marriage cost you, has but little to do with mine."

" Much of the disappointment I have felt, arises from regret, Mr. Huyton ; regret to see a mind formed for better things and nobler, holier tempers, a mind which can appreciate the beautiful, the true, the good, perverted by an unwise

and ungoverned passion, till it could stoop to malicious retaliation and mean revenge, for imaginary injuries ; to deception and hypocrisy, to carry out its bad objects. Whatever other sorrow I may have felt, my keenest has been to lose the power of esteeming one whom I had known so long." Tears started into her eyes as she spoke, and she looked at him with an expression of pity, he found it hard to withstand. She thought she saw a wavering, uncertain glance, and she hoped that, perhaps, even now he might relent. She ventured to speak again.

" Forgive me for uttering what may seem harsh ; my words were, perhaps, too strong ; but let me say one thing more. In three days you are, they say, to give your hand to Dora Barham ; and with your hand, to promise your love ! Is it affection for her that actuates you ? and shall you be sincere in the vows you plight her ? If not, what hope of happiness is there for you or for her ?"

“I neither know nor care,” replied he, hastily; “all I know is, that Thursday I will wed Dora, and that no persuasion, no argument of yours, shall move me from my purpose. No, Hilary! you were deaf to my prayers, cold to my earnest love, you turned from me with indifference, again and again. Now—” He did not finish his sentence, but raising his hat from his forehead, he bowed low, and then strode hastily away. Hilary sat down on the bench under the lime-tree, and wept bitterly. It was long before she raised her head from her hands; when she did, and looked around, twilight had fallen on the earth, and her last day at Hurstdene had closed in.

Startled to find how late it was, she rose to return home, and with a lingering glance at the swelling turf and white tomb-stones, she walked towards the church-yard stile, her heart full of deep and holy thoughts, of heavenly aspirations and hopes. Her mind was brought back to

present things by one of those rude contrasts which jar so painfully at such a time, whilst they recal the sad reality of sin in its coarsest aspect.

Lolling upon the stile over which she had to pass, she saw through the gloom the figure of a man who, as well as she could judge, appeared to be a stranger, perhaps a travelling pedlar, for his pack was on the wall beside him. He did not move as she approached, but seeing her, he said, in a voice which betrayed that he had been drinking,

“ A pleasant evening, my dear ! ”

Hilary felt alarmed for a moment ; but she had the courage of a brave woman, which, though it does not make her insensible to danger, even in the moment of alarm leaves her the calm possession of her faculties. She believed that to seem gravely self-possessed was the best check to vulgar insolence ; and remembering that there were cottages close at hand, whose inmates she could summon by a cry, she

said, in a calm voice, which would have influenced a sober man immediately—

“I will trouble you to allow me to pass, my good man.”

The ruffian, however, was insensible to the tone and manner of her appeal, and only quitted his position to grasp her arm, swearing that he always made a pretty girl pay toll.

Hilary started back, and raising her voice, called by name upon the inhabitants of the nearest dwelling for assistance; but hardly had she uttered a single cry when a strong arm was thrown round her waist, and so powerful a blow at the same moment was discharged in the face of her assailant, as levelled him to the ground. Half-lifted, half-voluntarily springing over the stile, she found herself safe upon the green, whilst Charles Huyton, whose arm had so opportunely defended her, supported her in silence towards her home. At the same time other steps were heard approaching, and the cottager

on whom she had called, hurried up to demand whether anything were the matter.

Hilary paused, and though with some difficulty commanding her voice, she replied,

“There is a man in the churchyard who has had a fall, Martin; go and see if he is seriously hurt.”

“And tell him,” added Mr. Huyton, “that if he does not instantly decamp, I will send a constable after him to-morrow, and punish him for his conduct. The atrocious ruffian!” added he, in a lower voice, which yet trembled with passion, “to dare to insult you with his vulgar insolence. Thank Heaven that I was there to save you!”

Hilary could not answer for a little while; her nerves were unstrung, and tears were following each other down her cheeks, choking her voice, and agitating her whole person. They walked on for some yards in silence; but by resolute efforts she so far conquered her emotion as to be able to speak.

“ I am much obliged to you ; I need not detain you longer, I am quite safe now ! ”

She would have drawn away her hand from under his arm, but he retained it still, and finding he was resolved to accompany her, she seized the opportunity to make one effort more.

“ Mr. Huyton, you are indignant at the man who, in his stupid, half-insensible brutality, has just alarmed me by his coarseness : but is it more inexcusable than the refined and considerate cruelty which tortures the feelings and wrings the hearts of those who having never offended, are yet sacrificed to the revengeful determination of another ? ”

He made no answer at all ; but she fancied, from the motion of the arm on which she rested, that he was contending with suppressed agitation. It was too dark to see his features distinctly.

“ I know,” she continued, softly, “ that you have good and noble sentiments left in your

heart ; your interference for my rescue shows that : your evil angel may whisper dark thoughts to you, but the promptings of a better spirit are still heard ; oh ! listen, and yield to it ; and, not for my sake, but for your own, your happiness now, and your welfare in eternity, banish revengeful thoughts ; forgive *me* for the fancied injury which you resent, and make poor Dora happy !”

They had reached the wicket gate. She paused, and held out her hand.

“ Say one kind farewell, and let us part as friends !”

He grasped her hand so firmly as almost to cause unbearable pain, hesitated, and then said in a wild tone,

“ No—no, I have sworn, and will not falter from my word ;” and throwing her hand from him, he rushed rapidly away.

CHAPTER V.

“Or perchance has her young heart
Felt already some deeper smart
Of those that in secret her heart-strings rive,
Leaving her sunk and pale, though fair.”

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

WEARIED in body, and exhausted in mind, Hilary entered the house with slow and lingering steps. Gwyneth met her in the vestibule with an exclamation of—

“How late you are, Hilary!”

“Yes,” replied the latter, looking fixedly at her sister. “What is the matter, dear?”

She saw, by the glow in Gwyneth’s eyes, and the deadly whiteness of her cheeks, which looked

like marble by lamp-light, that somethin had occurred to stir her feelings. Gwyneth laid her finger on her lips, and then whispered, as she motioned to the drawing-room door,

“Mr. Ufford has been waiting for a long time to say good bye.”

They entered the sitting-room together. Mr. Ufford was standing by the chimney in a fit of abstraction apparently, turning over the leaves of a small prayer-book belonging to Miss Duncan, which he had found on the table. They had, as I have said, seen but little of each other since the late vicar's death. He was devoted to his visits at the Abbey, which every week had seemed to engross him more and more, whilst the curate, whom he had engaged as soon as he had the power to do so, had taken almost the entire charge of the parish. Excepting chance meetings, therefore, their interviews had been few and short; but now he had called to say a last farewell.

Rousing himself when he saw the sisters enter, he tried to say something kind and friendly, but his words came stiffly and unwillingly ; and his sentences, instead of flowing with their usual ready freedom, broke down generally in the middle. Hilary was sorry for him ; more so, perhaps, than he deserved, but she did not study to suit her commiseration exactly to his merits ; she helped him all she could, by ready politeness, and a free, disengaged air ; turning the conversation, so far as was in her power, to safe topics, unconnected with sentiment or feeling. She told him that they had already engaged a house near Southampton, situated, as they understood, on the borders of some forest land ; that Mrs. Lawrence, Sybil's sister-in-law, had been most kind in superintending the arrangements ; that Sybil herself had been down there to see that all was ready, and that they expected, therefore, to find the house perfectly habitable on their arrival.

Mr. Ufford expressed the warmest satisfaction at this intelligence. He was delighted to think that they would have friends in their new home. Then he looked round the room, where he had spent so many hours, and inquired if they were not going to have a sale of the furniture.

It was, perhaps, fortunate for the composure of the sisters, if not creditable to the feelings of the gentleman, that this question was put in so matter-of-fact a way. It had been a sore trial to them, only to think of parting with the loved old furniture, companions of childhood, witnesses of their former life, bound to their affections by so many ties of association. Scarcely a chair but was filled by the shadowy memory of some well-known form, or a table but was connected with some of their daily habits. It had been a struggle to resolve to part with anything; but prudence and justice prevailed over inclination. Much of it, such as side-boards, cabinets, and book-cases,

was extremely heavy, and though old-fashioned, was valuable from the beauty of the time-stained wood. All these had been readily purchased by a cabinet-maker of the next town; and as Maurice had given the whole furniture to his two youngest sisters, the value of these articles made no inconsiderable addition to their very moderate portions. Still it was a painful subject, especially to Gwyneth, and perhaps, had the visitor evinced a shadow of sympathy in his tone, her composure would at that moment have given way.

He spoke, however, in a voice as indifferent as if he had been merely discussing the renunciation of a worn-out garment, and his companions felt at the moment almost surprised at caring so much for what ought to be so easy, and nearly convinced that it was the simplest affair in the world to break off half the ties and reminiscences of a life-time.

Hilary answered that the sale was to take place next week; whereupon he observed, that

he should then probably be at Paris, as he and Miss Barham had agreed to pass through France, intending to go by way of Marseilles to Italy, and to spend great part of the winter at Naples, with Lord Dunsmore. Accounts from him continued very variable, and it was his uncertain state that made them desirous to have the wedding a quiet one.

Hilary was surprised. "A quiet wedding!" thought she; "I wonder what they would have had." She had heard of guests to the number nearly of a hundred expected at church: she had heard of feasting of the tenantry, and ale and bonfires, garlands, and flower-strewing, processions of children in new frocks and bonnets, and other gaieties, which Isabel seemed indefatigable in planning in the most poetical style, and arranging in the most symmetrical manner. It seemed very right and suitable for those in the rank and station of Mr. Barham's daughters; perfectly consistent with their future expectations.

also, for they were co-heiresses of a large property, and held a leading position amongst the county society. Mrs. Hepburn had not a word to say against the facts, but it amazed her to hear such proceedings styled "quietness:" so she contented herself with observing, that she had no doubt but that it would all be extremely elegant, and kept her other opinions to herself.

Mr. Ufford seemed to take for granted that his auditors felt a strong interest in his proceedings, and accordingly conversed for some time with fluency on his bride's various plans ; but at length, remembering that he must go home, he took leave, with sundry good wishes for their welfare, and a kindness of manner which would have been very pleasing, had there been no private unacknowledged feelings to turn it into pain.

Gwyneth, whose face looked in a white heat, perfectly intelligible to those who knew her well,

watched him out of the room, and listened for the closing of the house-door, then turning away, she murmured, with a sigh of relief, "To-morrow."

The morrow came, and early in the dull morning, the sisters, accompanied by one attached domestic, who had lived with them from girlhood, when she waited on Hilary's mother, and was now an active and respectable woman a little above forty, set off on their journey, to meet some branch of the complicated iron framework which ramifies so widely through our land, and which, after a due number of changes, a sufficient degree of waiting at some stations, hurry at others, and misunderstanding at all, of trouble, of anxiety, and of delay, landed them safely within as short a distance of their future home as they could hope to attain.

Mrs. Lawrence kindly met them at the station, and her carriage conveyed the somewhat dispirited and weary travellers from thence to their

new abode. It had been a mournful day, and one which required every support that trusting love and humble faith could afford, not to overpower composure. After catching the last glimpse of those dear old trees, Gwyneth had drawn down her thick crape veil, and long after that time, no unnecessary word had passed her lips; but whether she were crying or not, her sister could not tell.

Hilary had so many important trifles to attend to, that she could not give her mind wholly to thought or feeling, and for some time she scarcely realized what had occurred. Still, in those periods of tranquillity which intervened, when she could think composedly, there was ever a light rising up clear and pure, although distant far, which brightened the gloom of her prospects, and prevented her being overwhelmed with sorrow. Hurstdene was not to her the whole world, as it was to Gwyneth; and though tender remembrances and buried affections must

hover round the graves of the dear ones lying there, her heart was not at the Vicarage now : the tie that had bound her was broken, and another, and a stronger, bore her on in hope. It was her husband's wish she was fulfilling, and she felt as if now that she was brought more entirely to depend on him, they were more closely united than ever. She might now give him the first claim on her thoughts, which before had been shared with her father ; and though hardly yet accustomed to the void which their recent and great loss had occasioned, she had hope and tender love to fill it up. Every step seemed to bring her nearer to her husband, since every step was in obedience to him ; and although the parting from her old home had been a bitter effort, she was able to throw her mind forward, with some degree of cheerfulness, to the future.

And more than all the earthly love which brightened her path, was that high and holy, that deeply reverent affection, of which conjugal

union is but a type and an emblem ; that trust and simple faith which can always support the most lonely, and soothe the most sad.

“ Yes,” thought she, “ if it is so easy to do my husband’s bidding, and follow his guidance, how much more easy, how infinitely more sweet ought it to be, to submit to the Hand which cannot err, to trust to the Eye which never closes, to obey the Will which has surely promised good to those who humbly wait on it ; only let me stay myself on that great support, and all will be, all must be, well at last.”

And so she charmed to rest her mournful thoughts, and took readily and thankfully the good which still surrounded her. In imagination, she scanned what her future occupation might be, and half wondered what work would arise to fill the place of those happy labours which had formerly engaged her. The education of her youngest sister would, of course, be her principal occupation, that would supply em-

ployment for many hours ; but there must be other duties, also, to be discovered and followed up ; doubtless, they would show themselves in time ; and though her work might not be so obviously laid before her as in her own home and former situation, she believed that if she faithfully followed the most apparent duty, and did her best in that, others would present themselves in time, and make good their claim on her attention, even as you may reach the extremity of the longest chain, if you have once secured the first link.

It was from meditations such as these, that she was roused by their arrival at their destination ; and she was able to come back from them with cheerfulness, to greet the kind and thoughtful stranger, who had taken such pains to show them friendly feeling and good will. Mrs. Lawrence did not enter with them their new residence ; she judged that the sisters would be glad to rest, without feeling constrained to

exercise civility ; she therefore left them at the door, with a promise to see them to-morrow, and trusting they would find all right, she departed. Hilary took Gwyneth under the arm, and they walked in together, leaving the two maids to arrange the trunks, whilst they took the first view of their new home.

Small it was, but very comfortable, and the furniture had been arranged by tasteful and loving hands. On the table stood the tea-service just ready for the weary travellers, and on the cheerful fire bubbled and hissed the little kettle. Flowers were in the vases, too, and the sofa was wheeled up exactly at the most comfortable angle, whilst their books, and some well-known drawings of Sybil's own, prettily framed, completed the pleasant aspect of their room, and spoke audibly of love and remembrance.

Gwyneth looked round for a moment, then, with a sigh, she threw off her bonnet and

cloak, and sinking on the sofa, buried her face in the cushions. Hilary took in at a glance all that it was intended she should read there, the gentle thoughts, the sisterly zeal, the kindly-meant attention, and refreshed and strengthened as she drank in such pleasant feelings, she turned her eyes on Gwyneth.

There was that in her attitude which told of utter prostration, both bodily and mental; which showed that the spring which had moved her hitherto, had lost its power, and that her energies were now suffering a collapse as entire as their former strained motions had been unnatural. Hilary went round to the back of the sofa, and stooping, kissed her cheek with gentle love. That soft touch overpowered Gwyneth; her resolution to conceal her emotions at all hazards, gave way; her customary reserve thawed, and she burst into an agony of tears, startling and alarming from their vehemence.

But Hilary felt that even this storm was

better than the smothered fire which had for weeks past been burning up her sister's heart, and consuming her life by a slow torture, so she rather encouraged than attempted to stop its progress; by kind caresses and gentle words of endearment, she increased the flow of feeling for a time, that so the source of grief being dried by exhaustion, a real and permanent calm might be the result.

Gwyneth wept till she had no more power to shed tears; and when her mourning hushed itself into a quiet, low sob at intervals, and she was able to listen, her sister spoke.

“Dear Gwyneth! this is my fault; your sorrow comes of me, my carelessness; -ah, how ill I have fulfilled my charge.”

“Your fault!” cried Gwyneth, “how? you are not to blame for the fickle temper and the hollow friendship which have cost me so dear. I shall be better now; this is the last moment I shall give to regret; to-morrow I will begin a new life.”

“Then I hope that will in part consist, dear Gwyneth, in letting me know and share your feelings. Do not fear that I shall encourage you to weak expressions of regret for the inevitable past, only do not shut yourself up in that frozen reserve.”

“Am I reserved? am I cold to you, Hilary? I did not mean it. But to talk of the past can do no good. I would rather forget it altogether.”

“If you can : whatever leads to discontent, you ought to forget.”

“So I will : Hilary, I was deceived in him and in her. She has been treacherous, and he was—ah, I cannot tell you what he was to me. I thought him all but perfect, and now——” she hid her face again.

“He has much which might have been good in him,” said Hilary, gravely ; “much which steady principle would have brought to rich fruit ; but his character is marred by his

visionary turn of mind ; his want of practical, hard-working earnestness, and, too, his high thoughts of himself. He spends his life in dreams of good, and disgust at the faults of others. But he does nothing to remedy the evils which disturb him."

" You have been disappointed in him, too, Hilary ; I have seen it long."

" I have. I doubt whether Isabel will make him happy ; but it is his own choice."

" No, it is hers, Hilary ; she had set her mind on it. I have been their plaything, but I will not be their victim. He will never know what he has cost me."

" You must not dwell on thoughts of injury or unkindness done you, Gwyneth. Second causes must be forgotten, if you wish to forgive. I was highly imprudent in allowing so much intercourse, and shall not cease to blame myself as the cause of your sorrow."

" No, you have nothing to blame yourself

for, dear Hilary. The past is gone—let it go. Hope for this world, and love, with its bright fancies, and all the youthful visions in which I once indulged, have been dissipated for ever. Henceforth, my life will be one of quiet devotion, and charitable exertion, and such other occupation as may suit a calm and contemplative existence. To marriage and all its attendant joys and sorrows, I have said farewell for ever. For you and Nest, all my cares shall be ; and my hopes shall be fixed on an immovable futurity. We will never mention this subject again.”

But Gwyneth’s frame was not equal to her resolution ; Nature would have its way, and the long-continued exertion, followed by a sudden relaxation of the strain, told now in a severe attack of nervous fever, which prostrated her for many weeks.

Hilary’s first work in her new home was that of sick nurse to her sister.

Languid and restless, too weak for exertion, and too excited for repose, Gwyneth saw the day arrive which she knew was to unite her cold-hearted and successful rival to the man she once believed attached to herself. She could not turn her thoughts from what she supposed to be then taking place at Drewhurst, and her imagination, morbidly active from her illness, presented to her mind the whole scene. She saw the picturesque park, with its ancient avenues and groves, glowing in the sunshine of a fine autumnal day; every leaf tinted by the early frost, which had changed the hue of the foliage whilst yet thick, and given the most glorious shades of orange, gold, and pale lemon, to the majestic oaks and beeches.

So had looked her native woods, as they last met her gaze, and the picture dwelt in her mind. Then she fancied the assembled friends, the gay groups of patrician beauty, the humbler concourse of tenantry and labourers; she seemed to see the broadly-smiling faces of the merry

throng, to hear their joyful shouts, their clamorous good-wishes for their young ladies' welfare. She pictured those two fair girls, in all their bridal splendour, flushed with triumph, or colouring with bashful feeling; she saw the bridegrooms standing by their side, she heard the words pronounced which decided their future life's history; she followed in imagination to the banquet, she listened to the speeches of congratulation; she saw Isabel's proud bearing, and unwavering self-possession, as she passed from her father's halls, amidst admiring guests and shouting dependants; she saw her enter the carriage, whose four noble horses stood prancing at the door, half startled by the bustling throng; she saw her waive a graceful farewell to the crowd—and then she started with a sigh, to awake to the consciousness of her own quiet room, its simple furniture and cheerful aspect, and Hilary's soft voice and tender hand, presenting to her the draught which it was needful she should take.

Yet, when her head was again laid upon the pillow, the same vision returned, still the sound of wedding bells seemed to float in her ears, the shouts of the crowd seemed to ring around her, and the flutter of bridal robes and bridal veils seemed ever wavering before her eyes. She did not know that they were the idle visions of a fever which so distressed her ; but in her weak and nervous state, she almost fancied herself endowed with some preternatural sense ; she believed herself the victim to some strange power of *clairvoyance*, and could not distinguish, in her languid condition, truth from error, reality from fancy.

Several days passed, and Hilary felt half inclined to wonder that she had not heard from Dora. Her friend still had possession of the letter from Maurice, on which she had so resolutely seized, but she had repeatedly promised to return it to her on her wedding day, and the arrival of that letter had been looked for as a

token that the sacrifice was complete. Why did it not come? Had her resolution failed her at last, and was she weakly unwilling to resign a memento which she had now no right to retain? Or had any circumstance occurred to delay or prevent this unwilling and unpropitious union? The former seemed most probable, and Hilary blamed herself again and again, for having done what she really could not help, but which she felt now as if she ought to have prevented.

One morning, it was at least a week after the day fixed on for the double wedding, the letter arrived; but it was not Dora's hand which had directed the envelope, and there was also a note enclosed for herself: she read it hastily.

"MY DEAR MRS. HEPBURN,

"You have, no doubt, heard of the strange and unexpected calamity with which it has pleased Providence to visit my household. Great as the

trial is, I am thankful to say my daughter Isabel is supported under it wonderfully, and the poor sufferer herself is making slow progress to bodily health. The enclosed portion of a letter, I imagine, belongs to you: as there was no address, I had no idea, until perusing it, what it was; though it appeared to have much mysterious connection with the sad event I have referred to. It has, however, furnished some clue to the melancholy catastrophe; but permit a most unfortunate parent to express his regret that it should have come into her hands; and in addition to say, that though highly applauding your brother's fine sense of honour, I must consider it most lamentable that he should have scrupled to make known his views and wishes to me, now that the result has been so disastrous; it is evident that the struggle between duty and feeling has been too much for my daughter's tender frame; had I been aware how the case stood, or at all foreseen such a conclusion, my

conduct would have been (as that indeed, of any affectionate father would be) extremely different. Trusting that you and your family are in good health, in which wishes my eldest daughter joins,

“ Believe me,” &c. &c.

Hilary's astonishment and alarm at the receipt of this letter were very great, almost overpowering her self-command. What awful event, what terrible catastrophe had occurred to Dora, so to humble Mr. Barham's tone, so to affect his mind, as that he would have preferred encouraging Maurice's suit could he have foreseen the result? The most fearful ideas entered her mind, and she could hardly sufficiently abstract her thoughts from this perplexing and agitating subject, to attend to the wants of her sister, whose state of weakness required the most incessant care.

Had the marriage really taken place; why

was Isabel still then at the Abbey? where was Mr. Huyton, or Mr. Ufford? what had Dora done? it was all perplexity, darkness, and fear. Her only resource was to answer Mr. Barham's letter, by a simple acknowledgment that she had heard nothing of the events at Drewhurst Abbey, and would be grateful for intelligence concerning her friends. "I have deeply regretted," she continued, "that my brother's letter accidentally met your daughter's sight. The difference in rank and fortune between him and a Miss Barham, in his opinion, placed an almost insuperable barrier between them; the attachment which he could not avoid feeling, he endeavoured to subdue or control; and as she refused to allow him to refer the matter to you, they parted, with no expectation on his side of meeting again. His own present happiness has been sacrificed to a purely unselfish desire for her best good; and if he has been mistaken, I am sure it will increase to an inexpressible amount the sorrow he has already experienced."

So wrote Hilary, anxious to state the truth, fearful of compromising Dora, ignorant of what had happened, and thoroughly alarmed and distressed by what she dreaded to hear.

Isabel replied to her letter, and gave all the explanation in her power. Hilary knew the rest, better even than her correspondent did !

Very different, in truth, had been the scene at the Abbey, from what Gwyneth's imagination had depicted. The ceremony had, indeed, been gone through, and Isabel herself did not seem more composed and calm than her younger sister ; Dora's pretty face was white as her veil and robe, but scarcely an eyelash quivered, and her voice, though low, was steady. Kisses and congratulations she bore with perfect self-possession, she graced the breakfast-table with her presence, and went through its ceremonies as if they concerned her not ; but when the moment came for rising from the feast, she trembled visibly, uttered one piercing scream, and pressing

her hand to her head, she sank down insensible. Her husband caught and supported the death-like figure, and would not resign the charge. She was carried by him to her room, no one dared to dispute a right to attend her, which he fiercely asserted ; he continued by her side, and when she opened her eyes they fell immediately on his gloomy countenance. The effect was unfortunate ; she was attacked at once by terrible hysterical convulsions, repulsing him with evident horror, raving at intervals, wildly and incoherently, of strange and alarming topics, and calling for Hilary Hepburn, in piercing tones.

The greatest fear was entertained by the doctor, who was summoned, of the result ; he declared that unless she could be calmed, reason, if not life, might be the forfeit, and insisted upon everything in the slightest degree connected with the late ceremony, being removed from her sight. Gradually her fits subsided,

and she sank into a state of torpor, supposed by her attendants to be sleep.

This alarming event, of course, delayed the departure of Mrs. Ufford, who could not quit the house, with her sister in that state; and whilst the rest of the guests took a sorrowful leave, Mr. Barham, his daughter, and son-in-law, endeavoured to console each other in their mournful terror.

Charles Huyton, yielding to the solicitations of the doctors, agreed to banish himself to 'the Ferns' for the present, lest some unlucky circumstance should reveal his presence to his distracted bride, and so bring on a relapse.

When Mrs. Ufford entered her sister's apartment the next morning, the attendant told her, in a whisper, that the patient slept. Then, in an unadvised moment, she added :

"We found this letter yesterday, in the bosom of Mrs. Huyton's gown; had you not better take care of it, madam?"

It was an unfortunate whisper ; Dora was not sleeping, only lying in a half-unconscious, dreamy state of exhaustion ; but the mention of her hated name, the allusion to that too-dearly valued letter, roused every emotion again, and a terrible scene ensued. Her fearful screams brought her father and the medical attendants, but it was too late, the sudden shock had quite upset her reason ; and from that time she had continued for several days, alternately raving wildly of the letter and of Maurice, or bewailing distractedly over her broken faith. That she was in the worst access of a terrible brain fever was their only hope ; it was possible that could that be subdued, all would yet be well.

The unfortunate letter had been placed in Mr. Barham's hands, and he began to examine it, under the idea that it had been addressed to Dora herself. He had previously entertained occasional misgivings as to his daughter's feel-

ings ; he had once or twice fancied she entertained a preference for the young lieutenant ; but pride would not listen to the notion, and her ready acceptance of Mr. Huyton's addresses had, for a time, relieved him from alarm. On Dora's return home, however, still graver doubts had arisen ; her manners to Mr. Huyton were of a kind which spoke of indifference, if not dislike ; and there was so entire an absence of confidence between the two, such coldness in the gentleman, such waywardness in the lady, so little interest or concern for each other, that he had often feared a violent and complete rupture would be the result. Mr. Barham had thought himself a happy man when, the marriage writings having been signed, the young couple had turned away from church united for life. Such is happiness based on a worldly fabric ; such are human calculations, human foresight.

Now he would have given anything to cancel

the ceremony, could he by that means have recalled his daughter's reason, and ensured her life. Now he fancied, that had he known of her prior attachment, he would gladly have gratified it; and struggled to believe that he would have really bestowed her hand and fortune on Mr. Duncan, had he been aware how deeply her happiness was concerned. Vain self-delusion; indulged in only to palliate, to his own reproachful conscience, the fact that he had never consulted her feelings, or really considered her happiness. It was easy to say what he would have done under circumstances which had not happened, and 'not very difficult to persuade himself that had Maurice made formal proposals for his daughter's hand, he would have been listened to with ready acquiescence, and not rejected with polite contempt.

Days rolled heavily on, and brought no change for the better. The fever gradually subsiding, left the unhappy bride weak as an

infant in body, and little stronger in mind. Her intellect seemed lost entirely, and it became an anxious question, whether returning strength would bring back memory and reason, or whether every faculty of the mind had been forever annihilated in the struggle she had undergone.

Hilary's sorrow was intense when she heard this sad narrative. Oh ! the misery that pride and passion, that weakness and want of principle, that sin, in short, brings into this world. What a wreck had Charles Huyton's wicked vehemence occasioned ! How mournful that such suffering should be brought on others by the wilful folly and self-love of one. No doubt good would arise in some inexplicable way from all this fearful train of sorrow and pain : no doubt, to those who received it humbly and faithfully, even this terrible event might prove a blessing. Still it was awful and almost overpowering, filling all those concerned with sadness and

distress ; and turning to bitter mourning an event which had been expected to make them glad.

Oh ! how she thanked Heaven that Gwyneth's sufferings were of a lighter kind, that her illness was so far more hopeful ; that her mind was so humbled and purified by her trial.

"I do not deserve to be so waited on," said Gwyneth, in return for her sister's care. "I am not worthy of giving so much trouble ; you are too good to me, dear Hilary !" And her only care then seemed to be to lessen her sister's fatigue, and repress all symptoms of suffering which might distress her. And days increased to weeks, and she began gradually to amend, her strength slowly returned ; her appetite, her spirits improved. She had laid down her disappointment and regret on her sick bed, she did not resume them when her powers of mind returned.

The autumn had found her a romantic and

heart-broken girl; the spring left her a sober, thoughtful, and yet cheerfully-active woman.

One day very early in the spring, before Gwyneth's eyes had yet lost their languor, her cheeks the pallid hue of sickness, and her attenuated figure had acquired its former elasticity and vigour, they had a visitor at their house, who, of all their former acquaintance, they perhaps least expected to see again. This was no other than Lord Dunsmore, who, instead of dying in Italy, as his friends had anticipated, had entirely recovered and returned to England.

Those were right who said that his disease had nothing to do with the lungs; his lordship was now in the enjoyment of good health, with no other remains of his former illness than a slight degree of pallor which suited well with the refined and aristocratic style of his countenance; it gave him an interesting appearance, which distinguished him at once among the many coarsely-coloured complexions, thick fea-

tures, and dumpy figures, so prevalent amongst Englishmen of plebeian birth.

How Mrs. James Ufford had borne the recovery of her husband's elder brother, the sisters did not know: people do not like to have their predictions falsified, and Isabel had confidently expected that he would die; but, as she had never even mentioned the subject of his return to Hilary in a very recent letter, they were only able to draw what conclusions they thought most probable from her silence.

Lord Dunsmore told them he was settled at Southampton for a few weeks, for the accommodation of yachting, which he intended to pursue as soon as the weather permitted, and he hoped during that time Mrs. Hepburn would allow him occasionally to visit at her house. He looked with great interest at the traces of recent illness on Gwyneth's face, and on her leaving the room he inquired with a degree of particularity as to the commencement, the duration,

and the cause of her loss of health, that compelled Hilary to own it was sorrow and over-exertion which had been the origin of her nervous attack.

Lord Dunsmore made no further comment on that topic ; but observed, that of all remedies for such complaints, sea-air was the most efficacious ; and he hoped Mrs. Hepburn and Miss Duncan would try what effect a few excursions in his yacht would have towards bringing back the colour to her cheek, and the symmetry to her figure, which he had once before so much admired. Hilary smiled at what she considered an idle compliment, and let the matter drop.

With a little hesitation of manner, he then mentioned that he had been to Hurstdene ; he was almost afraid to enter on the topic ; but Hilary was not overpowered by the reference, and gladly questioned him of her old home and neighbourhood. He told her all by degrees.

The Vicarage had been entirely pulled down, and a modern house was now erecting on the spot; why, Lord Dunsmore said he could not imagine, he was sure his sister-in-law would never live there when it was built: she would not like to give up the importance of being mistress of the Abbey; which eventually would, in all probability, be her own property.

He paused, and a shadow passed over his face. "Poor Dora!" sighed he, presently. She looked up at him, and then averted her eyes: but he read the glance.

"No, I do not need your pity, Mrs. Hepburn," said he with a half smile, and then immediately resuming his grave and feeling air; "the sentiments which would have given me a personal interest in her melancholy fate, died out long ago. Before I went to Italy, you must have seen that I was cured of that complaint. No one with an ordinary human heart can do otherwise than pity a creature so young,

so fair, so interesting, struck down by such a fearful blow ; but I have no regret for her which the wife of Charles Huyton might not justly inspire."

He went on to describe her condition as he had learnt it from his brother. She was usually calm and quiet, in tolerable health, sometimes sunk in the profoundest melancholy, sometimes showing the indifference and carelessness of a child ; but memory seemed completely gone ; she was subject to the strangest vagaries of fancy, and though generally gentle and obedient, occasionally betraying a violence at contradiction which proved she was not to be trusted. They talked of removing her in the spring, and trying the effect of travelling and change of air ; her husband, who was strictly prohibited her sight, was gone abroad already ; her maiden name alone was used to her, and not the slightest allusion suffered to remind her of her marriage or preceding history. Her favour-

ite companion was the lady who had formerly been her governess, in whose presence she seemed to feel herself once more a happy child.

Hilary shed many tears over the melancholy fate of one whom she had so greatly loved, and Lord Dunsmore himself could not detail the particulars without emotion. He told her that Isabel was become an object of extreme aversion to her sister, who was, however, very fond of her father, and her aunt, Lady Margaret.

“And poor Mrs. Ufford must feel it so much,” observed Hilary.

“Isabel is so accustomed to hide her feelings, if she has any,” said he, quietly, “that one can hardly tell. Mr. Huyton’s conduct surprises me most.”

Mrs. Hepburn looked up quickly.

“He absolutely and most vehemently refused to have any measures taken to pronounce the ceremony void, which, under the circumstances,

the father wished to adopt. He declares that the insanity is simply the effect of fever ensuing after the marriage ; that she was completely in her right mind at the time ; and that should she recover, of which he professes to entertain the strongest hopes, she is still his wife. It was with difficulty that her father persuaded him to leave her in his keeping, but I believe every expense of her separate establishment is defrayed by himself, and he seems wildly anxious to assert his title as her husband, and proper guardian, wherever the opportunity offers. Yet the physicians unanimously declare that in her present state, to meet might be to hazard her life, and would, at least, in all human probability, bring on a hopeless relapse."

Hilary was silent, but her features told of a strong mental emotion, with difficulty subdued.

"For my part," continued Lord Dunsmore, "I look on him as little less insane than his

unhappy wife, and cannot help fearing but that some day he will prove even more so."

Hilary heard Gwyneth's step on the stairs, and had only time to give her companion a hasty caution to avoid the subject, when her two sisters entered together.

Their visitor seemed so little anxious to go away, and altogether remained so sociably with them, that Mrs. Hepburn could not avoid asking him to join their early dinner; which he agreed to with an alacrity that bespoke either a good disposition for their society, or a good appetite for his meal. Nest had a hundred questions to ask him about Hurstdene, when she learnt he had been there recently; and his replies were so interesting, that even Gwyneth was drawn into the conversation, and found herself inquiring about old friends and old haunts; although, theoretically, she would have concluded that it was a subject she could not approach.

From that day, Lord Dunsmore often was their guest ; their little house and modest establishment seemed to have peculiar attractions for him ; and he was continually doing something to show his concern for Gwyneth's delicate health, and to expedite her recovery.

He was most anxious that they should take advantage of his carriage, horses, and servants, which he declared, were idling away in uselessness, as he never wanted them ; he made his sister-in-law, Lady Rupert, who was staying with him, call repeatedly to carry them out for drives in the country ; he induced them, as the weather grew warmer, to make excursions in his yacht, and in many other ways, testified his friendly feeling towards them.

Best and most delightful of all, he one day brought them news of their brother's promotion ; a circumstance which, as he was not appointed

to any ship, would probably bring him home in less than a month.

He did not say that it was his interest which had procured the step, but the sisters felt that it was, and thought that they had good reason to be grateful.

CHAPTER VI.

“Hear the loud alarum bells—

Brazen bells!

What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!

In the startled ear of night,

How they scream out their affright!

Too much horrified to speak,

They can only shriek, shriek,

Out of tune,

In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire—

In a mad expostulation to the deaf and frantic fire;

Leaping higher, higher, higher,

With a desperate desire.”

EDGAR POE.

THE long northern winter had nearly passed, and the breaking up of the cold weather was daily expected at Halifax. To the fair Hali-

gonians themselves, this season had been one of unusual enjoyment and gaiety, for more than one British ship had during this time visited them, and the Erratic had passed the whole period in their harbour. The political disturbances which had made this arrangement advisable, need not here be detailed; they have nothing to do with my story, and did not in the least interfere to stop the festive meetings, in which those far-famed belles are said to delight, whilst they added to their parties the unusual presence of merry young naval officers, always eager to assist by their company in social amusements.

It was true that the Captain of the Erratic was married, and therefore uninteresting; the first lieutenant too, was so grave and reserved, that, though interesting, he was inaccessible. It was whispered that he had been crossed in love, and was not to be consoled by any of the fair young beings, who, in their warm compassion,

would readily have undertaken that task. But though disconsolate, he was not ill-natured ; he was always ready to accommodate more happy individuals, by exchanging duties, or such other kindnesses as were required, so that all agreed that Duncan was the best fellow in the world.

It was evening, a social party surrounded the Governor's table, amongst whom sat Captain Hepburn, who was a special favourite there. Suddenly the alarm of fire in the town was raised ; no uncommon event, when nearly the whole of the buildings were of wood. But there was on this occasion apparently more danger, or more fear than usual ; the sounds of the uproar reached the dining room, where Sir Charles was entertaining his guests ; and in a few minutes the table was deserted, the whole party of gentlemen sallying forth to see what was going on.

There was reason for the outcry. The dark canopy of heavy smoke, reddened up to

the zenith by the reflection of the fire ; the crackling roar, the long tongues of fierce flames which shot up high above the roofs, and leaping madly off, like disembodied spirits for a moment visible, ascended to the sky ; the loud pealing of the startling alarum ; the cries and shouts ; the rush of many feet, the heavy roll of the fire engines, tearing helter-skelter to the spot, all combined to show that this was no common conflagration. One whole block of houses was so completely in a blaze, that to isolate the flame by pulling down others, and cutting off communication, seemed the only thing left to do. There were no lives in jeopardy, but property to a large amount was in danger ; the presence of the Governor gave a stimulus to exertion, and all worked with a will ; sailors, soldiers, firemen, towns-people and strangers.

The scene was awfully grand, as scenes where fire has the mastery must be. Other elements are majestic in their might, but none

have such a character as fire. The energy, self-will, malice, and cruel vigour of this fearful power, give the beholders an idea of life which no other can present. Yes, living fire is its fitting appellation. Living : a life instinct with the spirit of mischief, such as nothing earth-born can compare with. And whilst all worked as if for life and death, and the enemy still rose and triumphed, seeming at once to invite and mock their efforts—another alarm was raised of the same nature in a quarter at some distance from the first.

Whether the fire had crept along the ground, or been carried by a burning brand, or sprang up from some internal cause, could not be known ; it was too certain that there it was, and part of the crowd moved off in that direction to ascertain the cause.

“ For Heaven’s sake, Hepburn ! ” said Sir Charles, “ go down and see what new trouble

is this. I will come in five minutes, if more help is needed."

At the word, Captain Hepburn disengaged himself from the press, and hurried off. On his way he met a boat's crew of his own "Erratics," who, headed by Maurice, were hastening to afford assistance, and who now, with a joyous cheer, as they saw their captain, placed themselves under his orders. They reached the spot; one house was on fire; a large store belonging to three women, which had been but recently built of brick, and now stood alone, the first of a new block.

Oh, horror! there were the forms of the wretched inmates at an upper window, whither they had fled from the flames below; the staircase was consuming; their retreat was cut off. Already had a messenger been sent for a ladder, and as the party of sailors came up, men were seen approaching with one on their shoulders. But at this moment, a cry was raised, from

whence it came they knew not, that there was powder in the house, and the crowd shrank back in terror. "Better three women than hundreds should perish," was murmured round. The flames flashed brighter, the black smoke curled thicker every moment. Captain Hepburn sprang forwards, and laid his hands upon the ladder which the dastards who bore it had thrown to the earth in their hurried retreat.

"What, my men ! Erratics afraid of powder when a woman is in peril ! You have all had *mothers !*"

"Ay, ay, sir !" shouted the gallant fellows to a man, and assembled round him. "We'll heave up the ladder, sir," said one noble seaman, "if *you* will keep out of danger ; ay, and if needs be, go aloft ourselves. Erratics fear neither powder nor smoke ;" and as he spoke, the ladder was carried to the house, and in a second run up to the roof, where the three terrified women had crept for safety from a garret window.

Captain Hepburn stood at the foot to steady it ; Maurice was by his side. In a few, but peremptory words, he ordered all his men back ; he would remain alone : the instinct of obedience prevailed ; slowly and unwillingly the sailors retired, scarce condescending even then to stand out of danger. The ladder was so frail that the least experienced eye could see that it would not bear the weight of two persons at once, and yet the women, even in their perilous position, half hesitated to trust themselves to their only chance of escape.

“ Down ! down ! ” shouted the men, in an ecstasy of impatience, “ every moment you delay, you risk the captain’s life.”

Captain Hepburn tried to speak words of encouragement, and at length one, the boldest, ventured the attempt and descended in safety.

“ Go, Maurice,” said Captain Hepburn to his brother-in-law, as they together watched her progress ; “ go back with her ; you are not wanted here.”

"Never whilst you are in danger," was the lieutenant's resolute reply.

"Go," repeated the other, with more emphasis; "for Hilary's sake; if I perish, tell her I fell in duty—why should she lose us both?"

"Never!" was still the answer. "Go you, dear Hepburn, for *her* sake, it matters nothing what becomes of me."

By this time, the second woman had nearly reached the ground; the third, with feeble, tottering step, was commencing the descent, seemingly more alarmed at this attempt, than at the awful danger which had menaced her. Another minute and all would be safe, when just then a fiercer burst of flame issued from the window, as some new impulse was given to its fury, and another shout arose amidst the crowd, "The powder! the powder!"

At the same time another form was seen, a man laden with a heavy box issued from the garret window, and although the last woman

had but advanced a few steps, he began, with frantic haste, to descend the ladder.

“Back ! back !” was the word, which swelled in a shout from the indignant spectators ; “ wait for your turn, as you are a *man* !”

It was no use ; even as the cry rose in the air, the ladder snapped like a reed, and man and woman were hurled in one helpless writhing heap upon the gallant officer, who had tried to save their lives. Maurice was unhurt. Another prolonged shriek echoed the voice of the falling wretches, and then came the silence of horror, only broken by the fierce crackling of the madly exulting flames. At the same moment, the Governor arrived on the spot.

The sufferers were lifted from the ground, and borne away ; the fractures or contusions of the two who were uppermost, did not render them insensible ; but the captain wore the appearance of a corpse : hurriedly they carried him from farther danger ; and the next moment, with a fearful explosion, the house blew up, the ruins

of the front wall covering the spot where the two bold men had so recently stood. No more mischief was done.

“Would to God that I had been in his place !” sighed Maurice, as he covered his insensible brother-in-law with some of the blankets readily produced. He was lying on a door, which his men tore down to carry him.

“He is not dead,” said a surgeon, as he felt the pulsations of that heart which had beat so bravely. “Don’t smother him. Quick, with him to the hospital. His best chance ! I will go on, and get matters ready.”

“Forward, men ; steady, my boys !” and they bore their dearly-loved burden onwards.

There were tears amongst his crew. Tears trickled down rugged, weather-beaten cheeks ; tears from eyes which could have confronted an enemy’s battery without flinching ; but good captains make good men ; and sailors, rough and hardy as they are, have often hearts within soft as a woman’s.

He did not die then ; he recovered his consciousness, and heard unflinchingly from the surgeons the fate which would probably be his.

“ Maurice, do you know what they say ? ” inquired he, as his brother-in-law visited him. The lieutenant hesitated to answer.

“ My professional career is over,” resumed he, calmly. “ I may return to Hilary, and die in peace.”

Maurice concealed his face.

“ Yes, death may be slow, but it will be certain ; so it is to all : only I *feel* his cold finger touching me. The spine is irrecoverably injured, and I shall never stand on the quarter deck again.”

“ Poor Hilary ! ”

“ Yes, poor Hilary ; she will suffer : it will be your duty to comfort her when I am gone ; but I trust I shall see her again. Maurice, you need not pity me very much. One cannot live on earth for ever, and to die for duty has been my first wish.”

“Hepburn, I must go home with you.”

“Maurice, you must not ! you cannot ! there is your profession !”

“I don’t care, I will renounce it—quit the service—give up anything to be of use to you.”

“Madness—think of your sisters ; you know they look to you for help—of your honour ! your prospects in life ! would you give up all, and do me no good ? I will not hear of it.”

“What steps shall you take ?” said Maurice, resolved, yet unwilling to dispute the topic.

“I shall apply for a survey in due form ; there is not much question of the incapacity of a man, who cannot stir a step, nor stand upright ; and go home next packet.”

“And the ship ?”

“Ah, dear old Erratic. I have, I suppose, taken my last leave of her. Thank my men, Duncan ; thank them from me, for their zeal and care. I fear I shall never see them again,

nor hear their farewell cheer as I go over the ship's side for the last time."

He turned his face a little more towards his pillow, and whispered something about Hilary which Maurice did not catch.

However, things were ordered somewhat differently.

The next day, Maurice hurried to the hospital, with a face in which various feelings contended strongly, though pleasure might be seen flashing up amidst pain.

"What has happened?" inquired the senior, as he saw his countenance

"I shall go home with you, after all," said Maurice; "I am promoted!"

"Ah! how glad I am, my dear fellow, I wish you joy; promoted! how?"

"From home; *how* I don't know! I have no interest, you know, and none to care for me *now*."

A shade came over his face, as he thought how his other step had been gained.

“ Well, you deserve it, Maurice, as much as any one ; there is no need of considering it the result of interest ; your own merits have, no doubt, been the cause ; and it is come in time to reward your bravery the other night ; for your sake, *all* your sakes, I am glad. How your sisters will rejoice ; dear Hilary ! But I wish you had been appointed to a ship out here, to have served your time at once.”

“ I am sure I don't. The best part of it is the being able to go home with you. I should care little for it otherwise. But I must tell you what the Admiral said. You know he came in yesterday about sunset ; and the mail arrived this morning.”

“ Yes, I heard the salute yesterday evening. That will make it much more easy to have the survey ; I had been wondering how it would be best to manage, there were so few of the right people. I should have had to apply to the Governor.”

“Yes—well, this morning the Admiral landed, and then sent for me. He asked me no end of questions about the fire, and said some very handsome things about us both ; then he added, ‘The Lords of the Admiralty, with their usual discrimination in discovering merit, and promptness in rewarding it, having moreover, no doubt, had penetration enough to foresee what has just occurred, have sent out this as your reward. Commander Duncan, I have great pleasure in presenting you with your commission from their lordships, and beg to add your epaulettes from myself as a mark of esteem!’ I thought he was joking, till I saw the commission in my own hands. What a queer old fellow he is ; and as kind as he is odd.”

“And what did you say ?” said Captain Hepburn, smiling.

“*I* say ? I am sure I don’t know. I felt ten thousand things at once ; I was choking with joy, and all sorts of feelings. Going home with

you was, I think, my first and last thought, though. He took my mutilated thanks very civilly ; but demurred to the idea of our going home in a packet. Only think, the Erratic is ordered home at once."

"No ! is she really ; what for ?" The colour flashed up in Captain Hepburn's pale cheeks, and he made an effort to move his helpless form. Maurice raised him tenderly, the tears standing in his eyes, as he saw the utter prostration of that strong man's strength. His arms were free and living, but his lower limbs were as if dead.

After swallowing down his emotion, and arranging his brother-in-law more comfortably on the pillows, no easy task, for there were many contusions to be cared for, besides the great injury to the spine, Maurice went on.

"The Admiral says you shall go home in your own ship, Hepburn ; you need not invalid until you reach England ; you can command her

from your couch, and I will be your nurse and passenger."

"But what is she going home for?"

"I did not hear; what do you say to his plan? He told me to mention it, but he is coming here himself this afternoon; he and the Governor, for the latter came in just before I left, and told me he meant to come and see you. I must not repeat what he said to the Admiral about it all; but he was very kind, and shook hands, and wished me joy of my promotion; and talked as if I had done anything at all."

"You did as much as anybody," said Captain Hepburn, "except getting your back broken; and I suppose may share equally in the merit, whatever that may be. The result cannot affect that!"

"But about the Erratic, you will keep the command?"

"I will answer the Admiral, Duncan!"

"Ah, then I know you mean to give up;

well, perhaps it will be best ; if you do, he will put his nephew in with an acting order to take her home ; he is a nice, gentleman-like fellow, and the ship's company will get on with him. However, I should not wonder if they were paid off at home, they have been out three years altogether !”

Captain Hepburn did not seem to be listening ; he was considering some other subject.

The Admiral and the Governor came together to visit the captain of the Erratic.

“ I am sorry to see you here, Captain Hepburn,” said the former, as he shook him cordially by the hand. “ Why must you go and do the firemen's work, and get into this pickle yourself ?”

“ Well, if there had been any one else, I would not have interfered,” replied the young officer. “ You see I must pay the penalty for extra-professional zeal, by quitting Her Majesty's service.”

“Not quitting, I trust; a little rest and time will set you on your legs again. Go home to your wife, and let her nurse you for six months, and then you’ll be as well as I am.”

The sufferer shook his head.

“Never despair, never despair,” added the Admiral; “here is Sir Charles here, was telling me how his cousin recovered from an accident quite as bad as yours; so why should not you?”

“We shall see,” replied the other, quietly.

“That man who tumbled on you, ought to be run up to the yard-arm,” pursued the Admiral, warmly; “what are you going to do with him, Sir Charles?”

“I believe he will be tried for burglary,” replied the Governor, “as soon as his arm is well. He was endeavouring to make off with stolen goods, and must have broken into the house before the fire began.”

“Ah well, I hope he will be punished! but,

Captain Hepburn, you need not invalid ; I'll tell you what ; those sagacious gentlemen at the Admiralty have ordered me to send home the Erratic at once, to take his Excellency, Lord Somebody or other, to some court or kingdom ; you keep the command, at all events, till you reach Spithead ; time enough to invalid then, if you must. You might go to Haslar first, for six weeks, and who knows what might happen !”

“ You are very kind, sir, but I have really no chance of recovery ; and am so entirely incompetent for exertion, that I think I had better keep to my first resolution.”

“ Exertion — you need not exert yourself ! leave that to the master and first-lieutenant. Why, what do half the captains do now-a-days, but live on shore, and only go off to the ship when there is a man to be flogged, or some other excitement !”

“There are such instances, but they are hardly the rule, sir.”

“And you must know your friend here too well, to expect him to follow such exceptional courses,” said Sir Charles, smiling at the Admiral.

“I don’t mean to say it’s right; but a captain with a head like Hepburn’s, even though he had no legs, would be better than many a big lubber all legs and arms, without any head to bless himself with. And I know such on this very station; depending entirely on their first lieutenant.”

“Still I would rather have my own way,” said the Captain.

“Obstinate fellow! Think of the pay; you have a wife and family, have you not?”

“A wife, sir; but I will not take pay for work I cannot perform!”

“One of your absurd romances, Hepburn. I know you of old.”

"Not very absurd, I think : simply honest. And if a captain is of any thing beyond nominal use, let the Erratic have one for the voyage who can move himself without help, either mental or personal."

"Ah well, I'm the gainer, you know ; but what good will it do you at the Admiralty ? will they thank you for your self-denial ? Not they ; they don't know what such fine feeling is. Boards are always hard-grained, tough, and intractable."

"I am beyond caring for their praise or censure now, sir ; my accounts must soon be rendered at a higher tribunal."

"Don't be down-hearted, my dear fellow !" said the Admiral, gulping down something which seemed to stick in his throat. "I hope to have you under my command again some day."

"I am so glad Duncan has been promoted," observed Captain Hepburn.

“Ay, there’s a piece of interest, depend on it. How does he manage to get on? Not but what he is as fine a young fellow as need be; but then *I* know how things go. I would bet you anything you please, Sir Charles, that there is a lady at the bottom of that. I *know* he got his lieutenant’s commission because a little girl, having admired his handsome face, got a great man to speak for him to the First Lord. That’s the way the service goes on. Eh, Captain Hepburn?”

“You are not quite correct in one matter, sir; the young lady had never seen Maurice Duncan; she did it out of love for his sister.”

The Admiral laughed.

“His sister is my wife,” continued the Captain.

“Ay, indeed! I was not aware of that!”

“He is a fine, intelligent, brave-hearted, young man,” said Sir Charles; “a credit to the service, any how. His regret for your

accident, Hepburn, was touching, the other night !”

“ Well, I suppose the young lady has been to work again,” observed the Admiral ; “ for here’s his commission come out to-day.”

“ She has had no hand in it this time, sir, at all events,” replied the Captain.

“ Eh ! how do you know that ?”

“ Poor thing ! she is ill—married and ill—deranged, I believe, brain fever, or something of the sort—at all events, quite out of the question,” said Captain Hepburn, gravely.

“ Ah, indeed, poor thing ! I did not know that ! Well, you are quite determined to give up, and invalid, are you, Hepburn ?”

“ Quite, sir, thank you for your kindness and consideration. Thank you very much. You have been my friend, and you too, Sir Charles ; and if, as you are pleased to say, you are satisfied with my conduct, all I ask is, be friends to Duncan, if in your power. It is, perhaps,

the last professional favour I shall ask of any one."

"Well, my dear fellow, I promise you," said the Admiral. "But don't be down-hearted; you will soon be well. Good-bye."

"Poor fellow!" said the Admiral to the Governor, as they left the hospital; "he's booked for death as sure as fate. I am sorry for him, and if he is to die, he might as well have died within my command, and I could have given the vacancy to my nephew."

"We'll hope he may get home alive," said Sir Charles; and so he did.

Lord Dunsmore had been absent from Southampton for some days: he was visiting at the Admiral's at Portsmouth, and the sisters did not at all expect to see him, when one afternoon, a fly stopped at their door, and he, issuing from it, was shown into the house. There was something strange, excited, sad in his look, which startled both ladies, and made them glance

anxiously at him ; yet he seemed trying to speak as usual.

“ We did not know you were come back,” said Hilary.

“ I am but just arrived by train from Portsmouth. I wished—that is, I undertook to bring you word”—he paused ; she looked, but could not speak. “ The Erratic arrived at Spithead at day-break.”

The beatings at Hilary’s heart choked her ; she leant back in her chair, white as the cambric she held in her hands. She felt, she *knew* there was more ; there were bad news behind. He started up.

“ A glass of water, Gwyneth,” exclaimed he.

Mrs. Hepburn tasted the water, and then whispered—

“ Go on.”

“ I saw both your brother and your husband ; here is a note for you !”

Hilary caught it ; it was from Maurice, and she noticed Lord Dunsmore change colour, nor did he tell her not to be alarmed ; so there *was* cause for fear ! She forced herself, however, to look at the note.

“DEAREST HILARY,

“ We are here ; will you come to your husband ? he wants nursing. Lord Dunsmore has promised to bring you by next train. Come at once. I will not leave H.

“ Yours ever and ever,

“ MAURICE DUNCAN.”

“ Southsea Common.”

“ I am ready,” said she, rising at once. “ I will go directly.”

“ There is a train leaves in an hour. I kept the fly ; we should start for the station in twenty minutes or less.”

"I will be ready," said Hilary ; she withdrew.

"Go and help her, Nest," said Lord Dunsmore. "Please stay one moment, Miss Duncan."

"Call Sarah, Nest," said Gwyneth ; "tell her Mrs. Hepburn wants her. Now, my lord."

She turned to him for information. He threw himself on a chair, and seemed to control his feelings with difficulty.

"You ought to know," he said hurriedly, "she will be long away perhaps. He is very ill ; has had an accident ; lost the use of both legs—may be in great danger. Think what you will do in her absence."

"Stay here," said Gwyneth, decidedly.

"No, dear Miss Duncan, your brother mentioned it, approved my plan ; let Lady Rupert fetch you to-morrow. I will arrange it all."

“ Oh, what matters about us ! it is for Hilary we must think ; you go back with her ? ”

“ I take charge of her to Portsmouth : will you not let me provide for your comfort too ? ”

“ You are very good to think of me ! now let me go to Hilary ! ”

Mrs. Hepburn looked bewildered, stunned ; she was trying to dress for her journey, whilst Sarah and Nest were packing a small carpet-bag.

“ Law, ma’am, don’t take on so ; I dare say it is not so bad. Why should you expect the worst ? ”

“ I do not know what I expect, Sarah ; please make haste. What I do not take, Gwyneth, you must send, if I want it. I don’t know now. Surely, it is time to go. ”

“ Your shoes, Hilary, those slippers will not do for travelling, ” said the sharp-eyed Nest.

“ Give them to me, that I may pack them up ; here are your boots !”

The exchange was made ; in two minutes more she was in the fly with Lord Dunsmore ; than whom her own brother could not have been kinder or more considerate.

They were just in time at the station, and were saved all the agony of delay. Once in the train, Hilary began to ask some questions ; and Lord Dunsmore had to explain how he came to be connected with the affair. The news had been telegraphed early that the *Erratic* was at Spithead, and then came the Captain ashore in his gig—not the Captain whom Lord Dunsmore, remembering Hilary, expected to see, but another, who brought the news that Captain Hepburn was sick, on the invalid list : on this the Admiral immediately offered his tender to bring him on shore, and Lord Dunsmore had gone out in the vessel, partly from anxiety for the invalid, to take him late

news of his wife, and partly, perhaps, from other motives.

He introduced himself to the two passengers, offered his services in any way that would be of use, was most kindly received, and it was soon settled amongst the gentlemen, that whilst Maurice attended his brother-in-law to the lodgings in Southsea, which he had already sent on shore to secure, this new friend should set off by the next train, to bring back Hilary to the longing husband.

“Lodgings!” said Hilary. “Can he not be moved home?”

“I should hope he might eventually; but the first thing was to get him safe on shore. The lodgings are only taken for a week!”

“And he—tell me—I can bear it now, what is the matter?”

Hilary’s face shewed how she had, by a strong effort, brought her mind to bear, and her lips to utter these words.

“It was an accident, I understood ; he hurt himself, and cannot, at present, stand or walk ; though I should not have known from his face there was anything the matter. He is helpless.”

This did not sound so very bad ; Hilary’s imagination for a moment suggested to her a variety of possible accidents, which might merely disable him for a time ; and for a little while her previous alarm seemed unfounded. Then her memory again presented her companion’s manner, the fixed gravity, the mournful glance, the utter absence of all attempts at lessening her terror : he had never bid her hope, he had never said she was too uneasy ; he named no serious cause for alarm perhaps, but he felt it, and he meant her to feel it too. It was what he did *not* say, rather than what he did, which aroused fear ; and the cold, heavy weight of hopeless though undefined dread sank on her heart and threatened to crush it quite.

But there was a Refuge to which she could flee, a Covert from the tempest which now beat upon her head, a Rock on which she might safely build her hopes. This thought it was that kept her calm ; a feeling rather than a thought. It was the impulse of her soul, a part of her life, to trust and be still ; she had trusted long ; and confidence did not forsake her now. That was her strength indeed.

“ You were with him when he landed ? ” said she, presently, after sitting for some little space with hands clasped, and head bent down.

“ I was ! he bore it well : those things are always easily managed by sailors. ”

He did not tell her, for he could not trust himself, the scene on board the Erratic, when he took his leave of the ship. He had been carried out on the quarter-deck on his couch, to say farewell to his men ; there he had thanked them for their zealous services, their obedience, their orderly conduct, during the three years they had

been together, and bade them all go on, though he was taken from them, to serve their Queen and their country as nobly as before. Then, calling up the crew of the second cutter, who had been with him on shore on that eventful night at Halifax, he thanked each for his undaunted bravery in the moment of danger which they had shared together ; for their concern for his safety, and their ardour for his rescue, saying, that he believed it was to their promptness in assisting him, that he owed what little life was left him, as, perhaps, but for their ready aid, he might have been buried under the ruins of the fire, and never seen his country again. And now he charged them all to live sober, steady, honourable lives, to strive to do their duty, and mind what the chaplain taught them. “ And so farewell, my lads ; God bless you all ! and if we never meet again here, may we all reach the shores above, where there is no more sea.”

They tried to give him the hearty cheers

which he had once longed to hear, but it would not do. The cheer broke down into one universal sob ; and brave, strong men, whose hearts might have been thought as tough as the oak-plank on which they trod, turned aside to conceal their tears, or leant against the bulwarks for support, as they wept like children. They loved him well, those gallant fellows, and they knew that he was going home to his young wife, from whom he had parted on his wedding-day, only to die ! and they mourned not only for him, but for her, whose gentle beauty, in the short glimpses they had had of her, had been strongly impressed on their romantic fancies.

“ But if I am to be even a week at South-sea,” said Hilary, presently, “ what is to become of my sisters ?—they are too young to be left there quite alone.”

“ I thought of that,” said her companion, eagerly, “ and so did your brother ; and we

proposed—only perhaps, it would worry you to talk about it now—” leaving off abruptly.

“ Oh, no ! indeed, their comfort is my first duty ; I wish I could think of anything ; my mind is not very steady ; but it is not like our old home now ; it would have been nothing to leave them at the Vicarage.”

“ Well, I thought, if you approved, might they not go to Lady Rupert’s ; I know she would like it ; she is so fond of Gwy— of your sister.”

Hilary raised her eyes and gave him one look, so penetrating, so steady, that had he not deserved her confidence, he could not have met the glance.

“ Are you in earnest, Lord Dunsmore ?”

“ Earnest, yes—perfectly so, from my heart ! but I do not wonder you ask, after what you saw in my brother !”

Hilary looked down.

“ It seems hardly a time to speak of such

things *now*," continued he, eagerly and rapidly, his pale countenance glowing with emotion ; " but yet, perhaps, after all, it might remove distrust and doubt, perhaps lighten your anxiety in some respects, if I am open. Let me tell you then my feelings, and see if you will trust *me*. I do love her, and I hope to win her. Even before I went to Italy, I preferred her ; but then I thought James did too ; I thought he was in earnest, so I left ; but that as much as other things took me abroad ; and when the news reached me of his intended marriage, I own it was a relief which greatly assisted my recovery. Now I hope some day to gain her affections ; and though I, and you, and she, know I cannot say she is the first object of my love, and I am some years older, perhaps she will not consider these as objections,—perhaps I *may* succeed in time. Now after this, will you let her and Nest come to Lady Rupert's care ?"

"I will talk to Maurice, and—and my husband!" her voice faltered.

"I have been, perhaps, abrupt, Mrs. Hepburn, but circumstances must be my excuse," added he.

"What will Lady Rupert say?"

"She is my kindest, best friend; she delights in your sister, and would receive her as if she really stood in that relationship to herself."

"You have my best wishes," said Hilary, holding out her hand with tears in her eyes.

He thanked her warmly.

"James behaved very ill," said he, presently; "though I hope to be the gainer, I cannot excuse him. He was very, very wrong, one way or other. He was either too much or too little in earnest. Young as she was, she was not such a child as to excuse his devotion or his fickleness,—and it has hurt his character too."

“ Please don’t. I would rather not talk of it now,” said Hilary, gently.

“ I beg your pardon ; do you know we are almost at the terminus ?”

“ Yes ;” she was looking very white, and seemed incapable of saying more.

In a minute the train stopped,—in a very few more, the two were in a fly, and driving hastily towards Southsea. She could not speak, she could hardly breathe, as she saw walls and houses fly past them ; her heart seemed struggling to rush on faster, faster to that unknown spot in which her husband waited for her.

They reached the house, they stopped, the door opened, Maurice appeared ; Hilary had hardly time to see his expression, as he hurried to lift her from the carriage and support her inside the house. He held her in his arms, her face was hidden on his shoulder, as she whispered, between gasping sobs : “ Where is he ?”

He gently opened the door, and disengaging herself, she sprang in.

“Hilary, my darling !” said Captain Hepburn ; and in another moment she was on her knees beside his couch, and her tears of joy, and grief, of anxiety, and gratitude, and love, were poured out in her husband’s bosom.

CHAPTER VII.

“ I’m wearing awa’, Jean,
Like snow when it’s thaw, Jean,
I’m wearing awa’ to the land of the leal.

“ There’s no sorrow there, Jean,
There’s neither cold nor care, Jean,
But days are all fair, in the land of the leal.

“ Then dry that tearful e’e, Jean,
My soul langts to be free, Jean,
And angels beckon me to the land of the leal.

“ Then fare thee well, my ain Jean,
This world’s care is vain, Jean,
We’ll meet, and aye be fain, in the land of the leal.”

THE feelings which may be clothed in words of earth, and the love which can be depicted by mortal language, must be shallow, light,

and transient at the best. Those to whom love is but a creature of the imagination, and sorrow a pleasant fiction, may delight in dressing their fancies in eloquent phrases, and in dwelling on scenes of ideal distress. But the heart which has felt the deep-stirrings of true, holy, devoted affection, and known all the sad and stern realities of grief, which ever in this world must flow from feeling, shrinks from pourtraying it as from a sacrilege ; and whilst it feels how vain and unreal are the most eloquent descriptions, yet holds it a profanation to lay such feelings bare to the public gaze. It was not the cry of the *true* mother in her grief, "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it!"

A week passed away ; it seemed as if skill and tenderness and rest might perchance prolong the precious life of the invalid officer. He was certainly better ; stronger, with less pain and weariness, and there was no longer so

much opposition on the part of the doctors to the general wish of himself and his family, to transport him to Southampton.

Hilary longed to move him. The heat, the glare, the dust, the noise, the weariness of a town, to her eyes were indescribable ; and she could not imagine the possibility of any one recovering their health, without the fresh air, the sunshine and shadows, the soft breezes, the pleasant scents, and the soothing sounds of the country and the forest.

Was not the whisper of trees more soothing than the angry dash or mournful murmur of the waves ? and yet this was their most agreeable music, and was sweet compared to the sharp crack of musketry on the common, the louder reports of the cannon from the shipping, the wearisome notes of the bugle giving signals to the parties of soldiers drilling or parading on the open ground, the wretched street organs which haunted the vicinity, the cries of itinerant

vendors of oysters and such like, the squabbling of children, or the rolling of carts and drays in the back street, which shook the house to its centre.

For herself, she would have borne it all with indifference or patience—but for him, every jar thrilled through her frame, every discordant sound made her shrink, and every disgusting odour made her tremble for his comfort.

Oh ! to have him but away in their quiet cottage, where the open windows would admit only pure air and pleasant, shadowy sunshine, and refreshing scents, and songs of birds among the trees ; where their eyes could rest on green grass, and young foliage on the waving boughs, and flowers unstained by smoke, unwithered by sea-breezes !

And by the end of the week it was done ; Lord Dunsmore's yacht conveyed the whole party round to Southampton, and by his and Lady Rupert's care, an invalid carriage was in

waiting, which carried Captain Hepburn to the quiet, pretty home of his wife and her sisters.

The back sitting-room, whose French windows opened on the little flower-garden, was appropriated to his use, and had been previously arranged, through the zeal of Gwyneth and Nest, and the kind activity of their friends, in the way most suitable to his situation and infirmities.

And so May and June crept by, and the birds sang, and the flowers blossomed, and the bright tints of early spring deepened into the more unvaried hue of summer; and Hilary nursed her husband with unwearied care, and hoped still, and was patient and composed. There was nothing which friendship or affection could supply, wanting to their outward comfort; and nothing of cheerful resignation, trustful endurance, hopeful fortitude, and devoted affection, failing to their mental support.

Who could have guessed from Hilary's calm

brow, and sweet smile, and steady voice, as she waited on, and read, or sung to her husband, that she had the smallest foresight of the inevitable end? She seemed so cheerful, so even happy whilst thus employed! and she was happy too.

Every day during which her precious charge was spared her, every hour that she was permitted to spend by his side, every sentence of hopeful aspiration, or gentle courage, which dropped from his lips, was received as a heaven-sent boon, a favour as unexpected as it was precious.

“I almost think you like to have me ill,” said he, smilingly, one day to her, “you take such delight in nursing me.”

“Can I ever be thankful enough that you are *here*?” was her reply; “think what it would have been had your illness prevented you from leaving Halifax. Had you been lingering there in the hospital.”

“ Or buried under those walls, which I so narrowly escaped, Hilary.”

She shuddered, and then added,

“ Or had I not been your wife ; oh, how thankful I am every time I think of that ; how glad I am we married when we did.”

“ Are you, Hilary ? *I* ought to be, I know ; but *you* ! I sometimes think that it was a cruel and a selfish precaution on my part ; I reproach myself for having bound you to one, who, instead of being a protector and support, is but a useless clog, a heavy burden, a sad incumbrance upon you.”

“ Ah ! don’t talk so.”

“ And sometimes, when I have felt a little stronger, and thought that perhaps I might linger on for months or years, chained to this couch, and making you a prisoner too, wearing out the best portion of your life in this dull slavery, I have been tempted to repine, and wish the deed undone which united us ; I

have longed to give you liberty again! you might be happy but for me, Hilary!"

"What have I done, or said, or looked, or left undone, that you should speak so, dearest? Could I be happy otherwise? or is there any thing in this wide world which I could prefer to being near you, at least, whilst I can be of any comfort or use?"

"I know there is not, love," fondly stroking the head which was nestled on his shoulder; "I know it, and I thank you every hour of the day for the ineffable tenderness which makes me so happy. But, Hilary, you always make a pleasure of your duty, it is your nature to throw your whole soul into your pursuits, to do your very utmost in what you feel to be right. It is this which impels you now, which makes you my good angel, my too-devoted nurse. But were you not my wife, as I should have had no claim, so you would have felt less inclination for a task, whose charm to you is, I believe, that it is your duty."

She gazed at him with her soft, loving eyes ; put back the black curls from his temples, and then answered, quietly,

“ You know better than that ; you know it is something more than duty which influences me. A hired nurse might be actuated by duty ; *my* motive is beyond, above that.”

“ You do not know yourself, Hilary : you love me well, I know it ; but you would not love me so much, were it not your duty. You would not have twined all those warm feelings round me, had you not been my wife ; and you would not have had to suffer the grief which I feel it will cost you, when that day, not very far distant, comes, which will part us on earth.”

“ Are you worse ?” said she, the whiteness of her cheeks speaking her sudden alarm.

“ It is coming, Hilary ; it came slowly, imperceptibly at first ; now I can feel its advances from day to day. Can you bear it, love ?—we must part !”

“For a time, only for a time,” she murmured.

“For a time, dear love! yes, that is the comfort, we shall meet again; but you are young, my darling wife! you have perhaps a long life before you, and I shall not trouble you many days. Do not be too unhappy when I am gone; remember your promise long ago, to bear it bravely, and when time has softened your grief, Hilary, do not think that you will please me by remaining unprotected and forlorn. Do not let your respect for my memory, fetter your will or your actions. Ah! you do not like to hear me speak of it, but by and by, you will remember what I have said. There, do not sob so; did you not know from the very first, that we must part soon?”

“Ah, I thought—I hoped—a little, little longer—!”

“And I am glad I shall not linger to see your cheek grow pale with care and watching,

to keep you from rest night and day, as I do now ; ah, Hilary, you have made me happy, so happy ! But would you wish the deed undone which laid me here ? I do not."

"No, no," cried she with energy, "do not be unhappy about me. God, who takes you from me, will give me strength to bear the loss. Do not think of it. Whilst you *are* with me still, let me forget all but your dear presence ; we will not anticipate sorrow. To-day is ours ; to-morrow is in His hands, who will do all things right."

They all saw now, the end was drawing near ; Maurice, Gwyneth, Lord Dunsmore, they all noticed the increasing weakness, the gradual change ; they left the sick chamber with anxiety, they returned with trembling ; they feared any hour would end it all. Gwyneth especially was devoted to her sister ; her unceasing cares and consideration could only be excelled by Hilary's attention to her patient ; every household duty

was fulfilled, every wish almost forestalled by the thoughtful girl; and yet she fancied she did nothing, and was surprised if fear was expressed lest she should be tired.

Lord Dunsmore sometimes expressed this concern, during those short intervals when Gwyneth allowed herself the relaxation of conversation with him, a conversation of which Hilary was usually the topic.

“What have I to tire me?” said she; “you should see Hilary; what a wife she is!”

“I admit as a wife she is unequalled,” replied he; “but I know one woman who might compare with her.”

“Do you? I could hardly believe it,” said Gwyneth, innocently surprised.

“That is her sister Gwyneth—Miss Duncan, if you felt for me one tithe of the love I entertain for you, you would say yes, when I asked you to be mine.”

“Should I?” replied she, wondering, and yet thoughtfully. “I do not know.”

“Dearest, sweetest Gwyneth! will you not?”

“Oh, no, it would be too selfish, too cruel to think of such things now! Hilary wants my whole time and thoughts, and you would ask them for yourself!—I ought not—do not tempt me.”

“No, I would not engross them, I would only ask to share your anxieties, and if I could, to lighten your sorrows and cares; I only wish to have a right to joy and grieve with you. Could you not love me, would you not be my wife, if all were well here!”

“All is not well,” replied she, blushing crimson, and turning away, “why ask?”

But her manner was so little repulsive, that Lord Dunsmore persevered, and before long, won from her an admission that she would rather he should continue to frequent their society on the understanding that she would try and like him, than that he should go away altogether from the neighbourhood.

“ But I am so young,” said she, “ I cannot promise—ask Maurice.”

“ I will !” said her suitor.

“ I have still another guardian,” continued Gwyneth with a sigh.

“ You have ; shall I refer to him ?”

She assented softly, and he went immediately to Captain Hepburn. Hilary, of course, was beside him, Maurice, too, was there.

“ Dear Mrs. Hepburn,” said Lord Dunsmore, “ do you remember the wish I once ventured to express to you about your sister ?”

“ Gwyneth ! oh yes !” said Hilary, eagerly.

“ And you do not retract ?”

“ No, no indeed !”

“ And will you then plead my cause with these two ?” looking from Maurice to his brother-in-law ; the latter lay with his fine eyes fixed on him, listening with the most lively interest to the conversation, but evidently without surprise ; whilst the former evinced considerable astonishment.

“Ask for yourself, Lord Dunsmore,” said Hilary.

“I will: will you two guardians trust your ward to me? Give me Gwyneth?”

“Ah, with pleasure!” said Maurice, “if she says *yes* herself.”

“You have had my best wishes for these two months,” replied Captain Hepburn; then turning to his wife, he added, “Do you think she would come here, Hilary? ask her.”

“You would frighten her,” said the lover anxiously; but Hilary went to look for her at once.

“I am so glad,” said Captain Hepburn, “I hoped to see this settled; it is my last concern on earth, and I shall leave her with confidence in your charge, my lord. Hilary told me.”

It was an effort to him to speak, and his words were faint and slow.

Hilary found her gazing from the window, but her black eyes were dim with tears, and at the sight of her sister, she threw herself into her arms, with an entreaty that she would not think her cruel and selfish ; much as she liked Lord Dunsmore, she cared more a hundred times for her.

Mrs. Hepburn smiled, and soothed and caressed her, and whispered her own joy and congratulations, and led her to the other room ; and there the blushing and trembling Gwyneth had her hand placed in her suitor's by the feeble fingers of her brother-in law, whilst in few, but affectionate words, he assured her of his satisfaction, his good wishes, and his fraternal regard for both.

Maurice too kissed and caressed her, but he said little ; it was impossible to feel otherwise than deeply touched by the strong contrast between the look and the situation of those two sisters.

Gwyneth's black eyes were bent down, and bright drops trembled on the long lashes ; her colour came and went like the flashes of the northern lights in the clear winter sky ; she was excited, hoping, fearing, trembling, between present pain and future joy ; looking forward with a shy gladness into the prospect just opening, and then hurriedly calling back the glance, because to her dearest companions the hopeful view was closed ; she could scarcely welcome the possible happiness which they might not share.

Hilary, on the contrary, stood by, with her calm, serene eyes fixed on her sister with a quiet but heart-felt pleasure ; a satisfaction springing from the very depths of the soul, at the hope that Gwyneth might, perchance, have one long plentiful draught of that cup of happiness of which her own short taste had been so sweet. She knew the full luxury of loving and being beloved, and what was denied to herself, she

rejoiced in anticipating for another. And when she had gone over in her mind all the bright visions which the future presented to Gwyneth, and joyed in her promised joy, she turned her eyes once more on her husband, and the thought flashed across her, how great had been the blessings of her own lot, and how the privilege of having been his friend, companion, and solace during the last two months, was well worth the purchase, even though it were to be followed by a long life of solitary bereavement.

She was happy : not the happiness of this world, not the happiness which those of this world can understand ; a happiness above all selfish joy, such as words could vainly endeavour to depict, unspeakable in its depth and purity : for in her earnest anticipation of peace and rest for him, she forgot herself : she saw him to her fancy encircled with the crown of martyrdom ; and would she have robbed him of one ray of that future glory for her own selfish indulgence, or her transitory comfort ? Oh no !

But to others, to the eyes of observers, her feelings were a mystery ; and to outward view she stood there, another proof of the fading nature of all earthly happiness. Hers was the deepening gloom of twilight, Gwyneth's the rising of the glorious day-break. Life is full of such sharp contrasts, ever telling of change and decay to such thoughtful minds as can raise their eyes beyond their own footsteps.

Human feelings, indeed, afford but a quivering, changeful gleam, by which to view the edifice of life ; as pleasantly deceptive, as unreal in their lights and shadows as moonbeams on a picturesque ruin ; but there is a Light which does not mislead, which brings out each object in its true perspective, and decides the value of all earthly possessions ; and it was by this pure Light that Hilary was now gazing on life ; and so her heart failed not in that trying hour.

Gwyneth never forgot her sad betrothal ; it

was good for her to remember it ; and afterwards, in gayer hours, when surrounded by luxuries, and allured by the soul-engrossing littlenesses of rank and wealth, the recollection of the trembling fingers, faint accents, and calm, holy eyes, of her dying brother-in-law, hovered round her heart, and his memory, like her guardian angel, still came between her and temptations to cold selfishness and pride.

His approval spoken, and his blessing given, Captain Hepburn begged to be left alone with Hilary ; so Lord Dunsmore led his young betrothed to the next room, and then there followed on his part, such an out-pouring of long-cherished feelings, suppressed and concealed from regard to his brother, as Gwyneth had little expected to hear : and which she now listened to in wonder, as she thought of the girlish infatuation which had made her blind to his merits, and had just missed making a wreck of her happiness for life.

They talked till twilight came down upon them, and then remembering the world beyond themselves, they wondered to hear no sound or movement in the next room; but fearing to intrude, they waited anxiously, till Maurice returning from a walk, ventured to enter that quiet chamber. All there was still, profoundly still; for Hilary, with her hand clasping the cold fingers of a stiffened corpse, was lying in a death-like swoon beside her husband's couch.

* * * *

Three months passed away.

It was autumn again, a beautiful - October morning, and the yellow sunshine which fell on the green-sward between the boles of the old trees, like bars of gold, streamed also gladly into the pretty chamber where Hilary, in her widow's dress, was attiring Gwyneth for her bridal. It was Mrs. Hepburn's earnest wish

that it should not longer be delayed ; it had been her husband's last act to join their hands, and till the union was accomplished, she felt his will was but half fulfilled. " Let it be then," she said, " that autumn ;" and so it was to be ; they could not have resisted her calm, sweet request, even had she demanded a sacrifice of them ; and when she only bade them be happy, who could say no ?

But it was really to be a very quiet wedding ; Sybil and her husband came to them ; and Lord and Lady Rupert joined the party ; that was all ; no pomp of gay bridesmaids, only little Nest—no grandeur, no display. Hilary's weeds were too deep to grace a wedding, too recent to be laid aside even for a day ; no one asked her to be present, no one thought of it ; but her absence was a blank ; it toned down gay spirits, it was the fennel-leaf in the cup, the skeleton at the feast, the thorn to the rose of love, which else had blossomed so sweetly for the married pair.

Maurice, anxious to remain with his sisters, had applied for an appointment to the Coast Guard; and through the interest of Lord Dunsmore and the Governor of Nova Scotia, just then in England, had obtained his request; and immediately after the marriage, they were to remove to his station, which was at a distance.

Mrs. Hepburn was very glad of the prospect of employment for him; he needed something to occupy his time, and engross his mind; and active as his duties would be, they would not take him from her, which was a blessing. The solitude of their future home was no evil to her; and as to Nest, when old enough to need society, she could go to her other sisters for a time.

So Gwyneth was married; and it was, perhaps, no small increase to Mrs. James Ufford's matrimonial discomforts, to learn as she did, about that time, how far her own manœuvres

had contributed to place the late Vicar's daughter in the situation she now filled ; for Mr. Ufford affirmed, that but for her intervention he should have made Gwyneth his wife. So he said, at least, and so he believed, whether truly or falsely, who can venture to tell, when we reflect on the inconsistency of human feelings.

It was a comfort to Lady Dunsmore's womanly feelings at last, when she heard from her husband's lips, that her brother-in-law, when appealed to on the subject by him, before the journey to Italy, had avowed an intention of proposing to her ; since it proved that the feelings of girlish tenderness which she had wasted on him, had not been unsought, although undeserved.

Indignation at James's fickleness, and concern for Miss Duncan's feelings, heightened by very warm personal regard for herself, had hurried Lord Dunsmore straight home from Italy, to Hurstdene, to find her ; and the result was happy for both.

Mrs. James Ufford never forgave her brother-in-law, for not having died in Italy ; but she knew that family quarrels were ungraceful and unbecoming, so she abstained from them ; and welcomed her dear Gwyneth with a cordiality and affection, which deceived every one except their respective husbands.

In a house on the outskirts of a small town, on one of the most wildly picturesque shores of the kingdom, Captain Duncan and his two sisters soon settled themselves. There the days passed in that quiet but busy monotony, which makes time fly so fast. Affection and unre-served confidence were their solace ; and Maurice, occupied daily, and often nightly, by his situation, soon recovered the cheerful tone of mind which, when springing from a right source, is one of life's best blessings.

As to Hilary, her resignation was calm, perfect, and even cheerful too ; and strangers little guessed the history of her feelings from her face.

They saw the surface only, and could not look into the depths of her heart ; and yet, even that surface told as clearly of the peace of her mind as the waveless sea reflects the blue heaven which looks down on it.

Nest was the glancing sunbeam of their house, and to make her happy was a sufficient object to excite the energy of both her affectionate guardians.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ His long rambles by the shore
On winter evenings, when the roar
Of the near waves came sadly grand
Through the dark, up the drown'd sand.”

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT.

“ And is she happy? does she see unmoved
The days in which she might have lived and loved
Slip without bringing bliss slowly away,
One after one, to-morrow like to day—.”

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

“ You heard from Gwyneth this morning, dear,” said Captain Duncan to his sister one evening, as they sat together after tea. They had been in their new home about two years.

“ Yes, here is the letter.”

“ Hurstdene Vicarage.

“ DEAR HILARY,

“ You know how little I wished to come here, but George thought it right, and so we came ; and the old place is so changed that it is not so very painful ; only the date above looks like old times, and reminds me, more than anything else, of the past. It is a fine large house, but I hope all future vicars will be rich, or I do not know what they will do. Isabel complains of it as cramped and small however : it was too small to ask nurse and baby here, so my boy is at home. She considers it unhealthy too !

“ The church is finished quite. It would not have been, but for ‘ my lord’s ’ perseverance and purse ; and as Isabel’s extravagant plans were abandoned, it looks very nice. The graves at the east end are fresh and well-cared for ; that

dear old spot! You may guess how I went there first; and the seat under the lime-tree is carefully painted, and a date cut on it, of the day before we left Hurstdene. Why?

“I asked James who had done that? He did not know; but old Martin told me it was Mr. Huyton of ‘the Ferns,’—again I ask why? He is still abroad, poor man! and oh! poor, *poor* Dora! she is much the same, yet they fancy there are dawnings of intellect sometimes. I have seen her companion, Miss Lightfoot; I am not allowed to see her. Lady Margaret, you know, lives at the Abbey. Poor Mr. Barham is so changed; he looks humbled and heart-broken.

“After all, Hilary, real sorrow may be a great blessing; and can those who have never known grief—a grief they were not ashamed to feel and acknowledge, can they know how to feel for others? I think not.

“Lord D. went round with me and visited

all the old people ; they seemed quite glad to see me again, and asked, oh ! so many questions about you all. The curate is very good and attentive, I don't fancy they see much of the vicar ; I wonder why I ever supposed him such a devoted clergyman : yet he seems always immersed in business, desperately occupied. I believe it is *system* he wants ; I am sure our parish at Ufford is much better managed ; but then with two such heads as ' my lord's,' and Mr. Barton's, no wonder.

“ Things have certainly got wrong somehow. Isabel would have made a better wife to a peer than a priest, and there cannot be a doubt but that George would have been a better clergyman than his brother ; though to fill his own station better than Lord D. does, would be quite impossible. I must not write any more, he is calling me to walk——”

Maurice listened in silence to this letter, and after some meditation, he observed,

“How happy Gwyneth is!”

Just then Nest entered the room.

“How it blows,” she observed, as she sat down; “and it is so dark; I looked out just now, to try and catch a glimpse of the sea, but everything was as black as pitch; and oh, such a roar of waves.”

“Just the night for me to visit the South Point station,” observed Maurice, rising; “and it is time I was gone too; but this pleasant fire and good tea make one lazy, Nest.”

“Must you ride all along those cliffs to-night, Maurice?—it is such a storm!” observed Hilary.

She had not yet become accustomed to the night-work, so as to see him depart without anxiety.

“Oh, that’s nothing!” said he, as he put on his great pilot coat; “and this is a fine night for smugglers: suppose I were to intercept a cargo to-night.”

The horse was brought round, and his sisters both went to the door to see him mount. They stood within the shelter of the porch, shading a candle as well as they could from the draft, whilst its flickering streams of light fell on exterior objects, forming grotesque shadows, and strange contrasts, and then losing themselves in the dark back-ground.

Maurice kissed them both, and bade them go to bed, then mounted and trotted off over the hill.

They listened till the horse-hoofs had died on the ear, then they turned together to the house.

“Let me stay with you to-night, Hilary, do,” said Nest, coaxingly: “it will be so melancholy for you to sit here all alone, and listen to the great roar of the waves.”

Hilary smiled an assent, and they sat down together.

It was not quite nine o'clock when Maurice

left them ; but as they could not expect him back for more than a couple of hours, Mrs. Hepburn did not intend that her younger sister, who was now growing into a tall girl of thirteen, somewhat delicate and fragile, should remain watching till nearly midnight. It was true that she herself felt unusually nervous and uncomfortable to-night, but these were foolish tremors, to which it would not do to give way ; and Nest's health must not be sacrificed to her own idle fancies : she resolved that no persuasion should induce her to prolong their joint vigil.

The wildness of the night seemed to have affected even Nest's spirits ; instead of chatting in her usual lively manner, she was almost silent, only now and then exclaiming as a louder burst of wind seemed to roll over the house, or a heavier wave dashed against the rocks below. Hilary had learnt to love the deep roar, the hollow murmur, and the angry rush of the

ocean-wave ; they spoke to her of other times, in a strange language which was intelligible only to the finer feelings. What the connection was between their voices and the memory of the lost one, she could not have explained ; but she never heard the one without musing on the other : and now her heart had travelled away to by-gone hours as she sat by the fire, until roused by the clock striking ten, she begged Nest to go to bed.

But Nest still remonstrated, and entreated to stay ; and to beguile the time, began asking questions of their old home, and leading Hilary to talk of her childhood ; and so the minutes flew by, until it was really time to look for Maurice home : and Hilary again urged Nest to retire ; Maurice would be vexed to find her up so late.

Still Nest said, no he would not : he would not mind it for once ; she must let her sit up, and when he came home they would have a little comfortable supper together.

Whilst they were discussing this point, the younger, with a decided disinclination to leave her sister, and the elder almost equally unwilling to let her go, they heard, during a lull, the sound of a horse approaching at a rapid pace.

“It is Maurice!” said Hilary.

“No, that is not his riding; he went out on Acorn, and he never gallops him so hard,” replied Nest, listening.

Hilary looked uneasy; ever since the one great shock she had received, her nerves were as easily agitated as a compass needle, and though like it, too equally balanced to be moved from the centre of rest, still they

“Turned at the touch of joy or woe,
And turning, trembled too.”

“It is perhaps some messenger come to fetch Maurice,” said the quick-witted Nest,

who saw that her sister was uneasy: "for he is certainly coming here."

As she spoke the sounds approached quite close, and in another minute they had stopped at the gate. The sisters ran out, and threw open the door; a stranger was there, who advanced, and touched his cap to the ladies.

"Please, madam, I bring a note from the Captain, and am to take back an answer."

"Nothing the matter?" said Hilary, breathlessly scanning the messenger's countenance, as she took the note.

"Nothing with the Captain," was the answer.

And Hilary, retreating to the light, opened the twisted paper, and read—

"DEAR HILARY,

"Don't be frightened; I want some linen for a man who has been hurt here: some for *him*, some for his *bed*, he has nothing! the

messenger can tell you about the facts. I must stay and take care of him to-night. I hope you will not mind.

“Yours, M. D.”

“I will get what Captain Duncan wants immediately,” said Mrs. Hepburn; “come in and sit down whilst I do it.” She put the note into Nest’s hands, saying, “Ask for an explanation, dear,” and hurried upstairs.

The man, whilst he gladly spread his hands to the parlour fire, and refused to sit down on the chairs, which looked too refined for his society, told Miss Duncan, that a yacht had appeared off the coast in the morning, and that the preventive men, after watching it for some time, saw a boat put off for the shore, with only one person in her. As there was a heavy ground-swell, and the landing was extremely dangerous, although the sea at the time, a hundred yards from the shore, was like glass, they

signalled the boat not to approach. Whether the signals were unseen or unintelligible, they could not tell; the boat made for the beach, immediately below the preventive station. As might be expected, no sooner did she come within the influence of the rolling sea, than she was caught on the crest of a wave, thrown violently on the shore, capsized, stove, and the gentleman, for such he was, was dashed into the surf, from which he was with difficulty rescued by the coast-guard men, half-drowned, with a broken arm, and other terrible injuries to his head and person. He had been carried into a small public-house hard by, and after some hours they had succeeded in obtaining a doctor to dress his wounds; the remote part of the coast making it a matter of great difficulty to procure help of any kind, until the fortunate arrival of the Captain, who had told them what to do, and was now with the wounded man.

“And who is he?” exclaimed Nest.

"Nobody knows, Miss; the yacht kept cruizing about a while, but when the gale rose so heavily, she was obliged to stand off, and was out of sight before night-fall. The coast is so dangerous, you see, Miss, she would be obliged to run for shelter to some better harbour, or keep out to sea for more room. It would never do to be knocking about here in these long, dark nights."

"And you don't think they were smugglers, then?" said Nest, whose ideas of romance were all running in that line, and who was little interested in a matter-of-fact gentleman.

He assured her they had no suspicions of the sort; and Hilary coming down at the moment with the requisite articles, the man mounted, and rode off without delay. Nest had been both right and wrong; it was her brother's horse, though he was not the rider.

The sisters agreed now to go to bed at once, as Maurice was not coming home till morning;

and when Nest had repeated the story she had heard, in every variety of way which her fancy could suggest, she allowed her sister to go to sleep.

As soon as breakfast was over, the next morning, as the day was fair, Hilary resolved to drive over to the station at South Point, and see whether anything more was required for the sufferer there. Nest begged to go too ; full of excitement and interest on the occasion.

It was a very lonely place ; the small public-house, into which the stranger had been carried, stood low down on the beach, beneath high, beetling rocks, above which was the preventive station, and it seemed only fit to be the resort of fishers, or men of the same class. Mrs. Hepburn and her sister, on entering, found only the hostess below, and desiring Nest to remain with her, the elder made her way up the steep, ladder-like steps to a room above, where her brother was nursing the sick man.

The door and window were both open, and the pleasant breeze streamed in with the morning sunbeams, which fell on Hilary as she stood contemplating the couple within the room. Her brother was sitting beside the bed, holding the hand of his patient, but his back was to the door.

Supported by pillows, and evidently labouring for breath, the sick man lay with his face towards her ; but as his eyes were closed, he was not aware of her presence. The flush of fever was on his cheek, the contraction of pain on his brow ; his countenance seemed the home of sad, unquiet thoughts ; a thick curled beard and moustache of dark auburn concealed the lower part of his face, whilst the bandage across his forehead gave a more ghastly expression to his sunken eyes. Yet even in those worn and pain-struck features, she thought she recognized a something familiar, a something which sent her memory back to her girlhood and her forest-

home. He slowly opened his eyes, and said, in a low, feeble voice—

“Maurice, I should like to see—Hilary!” added he, in a tone of wild surprise, starting from his pillows, as his eyes fell on her. The effort was too much, he sank back, overpowered by weakness, whilst shadows of agony and terror seemed to cross his face.

“My mind wanders,” said he, placing his hand over his brow; “Maurice, I thought I saw your sister,—just as she was in the forest—the first time we met.”

No wonder he was thus deluded; for as she stood there, with the glow on her cheek from the fresh morning air, with her brown hair smoothly parted on her forehead, her simple bonnet, and plain black dress, she looked so calm, so youthful, so like the Hilary of his happiest hours, he could hardly suppose her a reality; could years have made so little change in her, so much in himself?

She approached, and placed her fingers on the only hand he had at liberty ; the other lay helpless by his side.

“ It is I, myself,” said she, in her low, gentle voice. “ Do not be disturbed, Mr. Huyton.”

She saw it all at once ; it was the friend of his youth, the very man who had so deeply injured him, that Maurice had been nursing all night.

“ Are *you* come too ?” said he, in a broken voice, as he fixed his dark, glowing eyes on her ; “ are you come to see me die ? Angel, whom I have so deeply injured ; whose sad path in life I have made still sadder ! Are you come to bless or to curse me with your presence ? Can you forgive me now ?”

“ Forgive ! ah yes—as I would be forgiven—long, long ago I forgave !”

“ What a wretch I have been ; yet I thought I loved you ! and it *was* love, earnest, real love, till your rejection turned it into bitterness. Oh,

if I had but listened to your pleading ; yielded to your mild remonstrances. Maurice, tell her that I have repented."

" Hilary will believe it, I am sure, Charles," replied Maurice ; " do not exhaust yourself by emotion."

" Let me talk, my end is near. Listen. I was wild, frantic with grief and remorse ; horror-stricken at the wreck I had made of Dora's happiness, vainly repenting when too late—when—ah Hilary ! forgive me—when, as you were once more free, I found myself fettered to her—poor thing ! Miserable, I wandered from country to country—till I met with one who taught me better, a true minister of the Gospel, who taught me better, and sent me home to my duty—too long neglected. I intended to do right—I meant to try and remedy, so far as I could, the miserable past ; my first step was to see Maurice, and ask his pardon. I came here, and now I am dying—it is the only thing which

can really repair my crimes. To hear him speak forgiveness has been my best comfort. Now let me die ! ”

Hilary's tears fell fast over the hand she held in hers.

“ Must he die, Maurice ? ” whispered she.

Captain Duncan shook his head, sadly.

Charles again opened his eyes, which he had closed as sharp pains shot through him. The cold drops of agony which stood on his forehead his friend wiped gently away.

“ Yes, I must die,” whispered he again to Hilary ; “ I know it ; this pain will only cease when mortification begins. I must die ; and I am thankful for it. I do not deserve it ; a long life of penitence and sorrow would have been my fitting fate ; I have no right even to ask for a speedy release. But for you, for others, it is better I should go ; if I could only repair my mad folly, my savage wickedness ; if I could only, in giving Dora liberty, give her back the

reason I frightened away ; oh, I would suffer twenty times more pain, could I restore her to you, Maurice, as she was."

" God's will be done !" said Maurice, gravely ;
" He gave, he took away ! Since she has been your wife, Charles, she has ceased to be the Dora of my fancy."

" You are weeping for me, Hilary—how many tears I have made you shed. I do not deserve one gentle thought : it was in mercy, undeserved mercy, you were sent here, that I might hear you say you forgive me."

" I do, indeed, from my soul."

" And if *you* do, you, who might have felt resentment—a fellow mortal—I hope—I trust—I believe the Most High will hear my penitence—and for that dear love which died for us all——" his voice failed him again, in a fit of agonizing pain, terrible to see.

The injuries had been principally internal, and during the hours which had passed before me-

dical aid was procured, inflammation had commenced, which it was now evident must end in death.

"Leave me," said he, when he again had power to speak ; "leave me, Hilary, I do not deserve to give you pain ; you suffer in seeing me suffer."

"No, let me stay," she said calmly ; "let me nurse you."

"Leave me ; I once loved you better than life, than duty, than Heaven ; but I have struggled with a passion, wrong in its excess, criminal in the husband of another. I have learnt to govern it—to subdue it ; but do not come between me and better thoughts, do not drag me back to earthly feelings. Let me voluntarily renounce the dearest, sweetest thing on earth ; let me prove my sincerity to myself. Leave me !"

She rose, and though she longed to linger there, she passed from the bed-side, after one soft pressure of his feverish fingers.

"Farewell, till we meet above," said she, and

went from the room. She did not, however, leave the house ; but as soon as she went down stairs, she sent off Nest and the servant, who had driven them, over to the town to find the parish priest, and beg him to visit the dying man.

Whatever friendship could suggest to soothe his pain, or pastoral prayer and counsel could afford to support and guide him aright, was granted him. But it was not till towards the afternoon, that the fierce pain subsided, and he became calm. Then they knew that death was rapidly advancing.

In the grey twilight, Hilary and Maurice returned home together, leaving the friend and companion of their youth a quiet corpse. After years of disappointment, anger, remorse, and repentance, he slept in peace.

Hilary cried quietly, nearly the whole drive home ; she could not help it. It was not only painful regret, or sorrow for the dead ; but old thoughts had been revived, old feelings, buried happiness, vanished hopes, the gay visions of

youth, all seemed suddenly awakened at this painful meeting. And it is an awful thing to stand by the bed of one whose wild passions, ungoverned tempers, and wasted youth, have brought on disappointment and death, even though we may hope they have ended in true penitence and faith. We may hope, but we must tremble too!

Mr. Barham was sitting one afternoon with his youngest daughter, who was amusing herself, with childish pleasure, over some brilliant flowers, when the second post came in, and brought him a letter from Maurice.

Captain Duncan wrote to him for directions as to the corpse of his son-in-law. His yacht had come into harbour the day after the storm, and the Captain suggested that they should carry the deceased owner round to Bristol, as the nearest port to 'the Ferns,' from whence the corpse could be transferred, according to Mr. Barham's pleasure. They waited his orders, as the guardian of Charles Huyton's widow.

The letter contained the detail of his sad and yet hopeful end. It dropped from Mr. Barham's hands, after he had read it, and crossing his arms on the desk before him, he laid down his head and groaned aloud. The manly, feeling tone of the letter, and all the sad thoughts it had called up, oppressed him deeply.

His daughter looking up and seeing his emotion, went close to his chair, and stroking his head as a child might do, she said, in a fondling voice :

“Poor papa, poor papa! what is the matter?”

This completely overpowered him, he sobbed like a boy.

“Don't cry, papa—yes, do—I wish I could too : I never cry now—I have no tears left—if I could only cry, the great weight on my head might go.”

Then, in her childish way, she took the letter he had dropped, and said : “I think I will read it too.”

She did so, for her father was too much overwhelmed to think.

“Father,” said she, “I think—I remember—did I dream it, or was it true, that I once married Charles Huyton—that I was called his wife?”

Her tone was altered, it was her own voice ; her father raised his head in amazement, and looked at her. Strange gleams of thought flitted across her face, like lights and shadows on a still ocean ; memory and mind were struggling with the dull torpor of disease. Her brain was awaking ! she slowly read again the touching words of Maurice Duncan ; she looked on his name at the conclusion of the letter. She thought—she felt—she remembered the past.

“He was my husband,” said she.

“He was, dear child,” replied her father, trembling.

“Why did he leave me?” said she, dreamily ; he feared her intellect was fading again.

“ You have been ill, my darling, we have been nursing you long,” said he, drawing her down towards him.

“ Stop, let me think ;” she put her hand to her forehead ; “ he is dead, they say—dead, poor Charles !—and did not see me first—I am his widow then—” again her mind appeared in her working countenance. “ Ah, I remember all now ; he did not love *me*, he loved Hilary Duncan, and there was Maurice who loved me —and we parted ! poor Maurice—and he was with him when he died—oh, papa—”

She threw herself on the ground at his feet, and laying her head against his knee, she shed the first tears she had wept for years. Her father kissed and caressed her fondly, making her tears flow faster and faster, until she had wept away the mist from her mind, the torpor from her faculties, and was reasonable, rational, and quiet.

Extreme exhaustion ensued ; but by incessant

care, and the most skilful treatment, her strength slowly returned, and with her strength came perfect memory and command of her faculties.

Slowly she learnt to appreciate her position, to interest herself in her property, to assume her station as the mistress of 'the Ferns,' the widow of Charles Huyton; and when a year had passed away, there remained no traces of her illness, except the steadiness and gravity which now marked her manners, in striking contrast with her girlish habits.

* * * *

* * * *

"Hilary, dear," said Dora Duncan, one day to her sister-in-law, as they strolled together under the old lime-trees at 'the Ferns,' whilst Nest, a tall graceful young woman, was playing with her little nephew, Maurice, "Hilary, why are you not happy?"

"Happy! I am, content, peaceful, happy, as one can be in this world, dear Dora."

"But you have none to love you *best*," said Dora.

"I have enough: you, Maurice, my sisters, and the children; I am rich in love, and loving hearts."

"And do they satisfy you?"

"No, I should be sorry if they did. Nothing of this world can, in itself: it is only as it partakes of the nature of Heaven, that it can fill the soul. But, Dora, the one whom I loved best in this world is at peace, his longing for perfection is satisfied, his hunger for righteousness is filled now; no sorrow can touch him, no pain, no trouble more; and I shall join him, I trust, at last. What else have I to wish for now?"

"Still, Hilary, it seems sad."

"Who, going through the vale of misery, use it for a well, and the pools are filled with water," continued Hilary; "do you remember what follows, Dora? My best treasure is safe,

and for the rest, though I can joy or weep with you all, I cannot attach my heart to earth again. But does my gravity distress you?"

"Oh no, no, no! you are not sad to look at, you are all love, and peace, and sympathy; what should we do without you?"

"That is my happiness, so far as earth is concerned, to love and to serve here below, in the hope that in my home above I may serve and love for ever."

THE END.



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